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Tiivistelmä – Abstrakt – Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand how Finnish educational policy experts made sense of multiculturalism in the context of vocational education and training (VET). VET is responsible for integrating migrants and students with a migrant background into Finnish working life and society. National experts have a unique perspective on how increasing cultural diversity amongst students is changing institutional and grassroots reality in VET.

Social representation theory was selected as the theoretical framework for this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven national experts from key organizations working with VET. The interview data was qualitatively first analyzed in terms of thematic content and finally in search of potential social representations and possible corresponding anchors and objectifications.

All of the experts were experienced and knowledgeable about multiculturalism in VET and openly expressed their thoughts. The VET reform was a central part of the background of this study but was not itself the focus. The experts' social representation of multiculturalism included descriptive and normative dimensions. The descriptive focused on the lived reality of multiculturalism in VET from various perspectives while the normative focused on normative institutional, organizational and cultural responses to it. Experts described different tensions, conflicts and anxieties caused by increasing cultural diversity in both VET as well as civic and working life in Finland. These descriptions were combined with critical reflections on how multiculturalism is currently being prioritized and accommodated in educational policy and practice. Finally, the experts' speech was infused with metarepresentations about the way different social actors engage in collective struggle over the meaning of multiculturalism. Experts used their social representation of multiculturalism in order to defend and uphold the social values at the core of the Finnish education system and contribute to a better future in which everyone studying in VET can be themselves.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
Social representation, multiculturalism, vocational education and training, metarepresentation

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Suomalaisten asiantuntijoiden sosiaalisia representaatioita monikulttuurisuudesta ammatillisessa koulutuksessa

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Tiivistelmä – Abstrakt – Abstract

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus on ymmärtää miten suomalaiset koulutuspolitiikan asiantuntijat hahmottavat monikulttuurisuutta ammatillisen koulutuksessa. Ammatillinen koulutus on pitkälti vastuussa maahanmuuttajien ja maahanmuuttajataustaisten opiskelijoiden integroimisesta suomalaiseen työelämään ja yhteiskuntaan. Kansallisilla koulutuspolitiikan asiantuntijoilla on ainutlaatuinen näkökulma siihen miten lisääntyvä kulttuurinen moninaisuus opiskelijoiden keskuudessa muokkaa institutionaalista sekä ruohonjuuritason todellisuutta ammatillisissa oppilaitoksissa ja työelämässä.

Sosiaalisten representaatioiden teoria valikoitui tutkimuksen teoreettiseksi viitekehykseksi. Tutkimus nojautuu 11 kansallisen ammattikoulutusjärjestelmän asiantuntijan puolistrukturoituun haastatteluun. Tutkimusaineistolle suoritettiin laadullinen teema-analyysi, jonka jälkeen etsittiin mahdollisia sosiaalisia representaatioita ja niihin kytkeytyviä ankkureita ja objektivointeja.

Kaikki asiantuntijat olivat kokeneita ja perehtyneitä monikulttuurisuuteen ammatillisessa koulutuksessa ja ilmaisivat ajatuksiaan avoimesti. Ammatillisen koulutuksen uudistus oli keskeinen osa tutkimuksen taustaa mutta ei sen varsinainen kohde. Asiantuntijoiden sosiaalisessa representaatiossa oli deskriptiivinen ja normatiivinen ulottuvuus. Asiantuntijat kuvasivat erilaisia jännitteitä, konflikteja ja pelkoja joita lisääntyvä kulttuurinen moninaisuus herättää ammatillisessa koulutuksessa sekä suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa ja työelämässä. He jakoivat omia ajatuksiaan siitä miten monikulttuurisuutta tällä hetkellä priorisoidaan ja käsitellään koulutuspolitiikassa erilaisten intressiryhmien toimesta. Asiantuntijat hyödynsivät sosiaalisia representaatioita puolustaakseen suomalaisen koulutusjärjestelmän kannalta keskeisiä arvoja ja rakentaakseen parempaa maailmaa, jossa jokainen ammatillisessa koulutuksessa opiskeleva voi olla oma itsensä.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
Sosiaalinen representaatio, monikulttuurisuus, ammatillinen koulutus, metarepresentaatio

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Social representations of multiculturalism amongst national experts in Finnish vocational education and training

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1. Introduction

Finland is far more culturally diverse than it was twenty years ago. This has led to profound changes in many different sectors of society. Multiculturalism encompasses a wide range of phenomena but can be broadly understood as referring both to the "brute fact" of increasing cultural diversity in Western societies as well as to a particular political ideology centering around accommodation and respect for cultural and ethnic differences (Viitakainen, 2013). Cultural diversity is more visible than ever in Finnish vocational education and training (VET), which functions as one of the most important channels for the integration of migrants and students with a migrant background into Finnish society and working life. The percentage of foreign-language speakers (students who speak some other language than Finnish, Swedish or Saami at home) in VET has increased by more than 50% between 2010-2015 (Lappi & Portin, 2017). Futhermore, five times as many students with a migrant background are studying in vocational education compared to upper secondary general education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). There is growing concern in Finnish society for migrants' disproportionately low educational outcomes and lack of labor market integration.

Educational institutes do not operate within a vacuum but reflect tensions and conflicts in society. There is a consensus amongst educators and experts that migrant students' relatively weak outcomes on the latest PISA tests reflect increasing inequality in educational attainment (OECD, 2018b). Furthermore, research indicates that racism and ethnic discrimination are significant problems in Finnish vocational education. For example, the VET-Barometer (OTUS, 2017) by the National Union of Vocational Students in Finland revealed that in a survey of 9 700 students, 25% of students from a migrant background reported having experienced discrimination from their teachers and staff based on their cultural and ethnic background. According to a report by the National Institute for Health and Welfare (Halme et al., 2017), comprehensive school students with a migrant background are significantly more likely to grow up in unsafe environments and experience repeated bullying and physical violence by peers at school. Approximately a third of students with a migrant background have experienced discriminatory bullying. It is clear that discrimination negatively impacts development and creates a problematic continuum for youth in terms of psychosocial

integration and identity-construction, further exasperating learning and social difficulties and making it less likely that students will succeed in their education. Different studies and surveys have consistently revealed negative attitudes towards immigrants amongst Finnish VET students (Suomen opiskelija-allianssi – OSKU ry, 2018; Opetushallitus, 2018). In addition, recent polls indicate that opposition to migration is highest amongst people with only a vocational qualification (e.g. Haavisto, 2019).

Multiculturalism in Finnish vocational education is of particular interest because the institutional framework of VET itself is in a state of flux. VET is currently undergoing the largest educational reform seen in Finnish education in the last twenty years (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017a). At the same time, VET's capacity to reinvent itself has been hampered by the fact that it was the hit hard by budget cuts resulting from government austerity policy. The annual budget of VET dropped by approximately 20% between 2013-2018, in excess of 400 million euros (HE 123, 2018). At the same time as the budget was cut, the newly reformed VET system was tasked with handling a significant new target group: the thousands of mainly Iraqi and Afghan nationals that arrived in Finland in 2015 and 2016 seeking asylum. It is expected that many migrants who have been granted asylum in Finland will take their first steps into Finnish society and the labor market through vocational education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016).

One of the central objectives of the VET reform has been to better address students' personal educational needs. Foreign-language speakers are a key group in this regard, because their dropout rate is significantly higher when compared to Finnish or Swedish speakers and also because they are more than twice as likely to not have completed secondary education (OECD, 2018a). It is clear that Finnish education must be improved to better accommodate the growing cultural diversity of the student body. Increasing cultural diversity necessitates new pedagogical strategies, better learning materials, updated teacher-training, multicultural competences and a whole range of other adjustments. It is not an exaggeration to say that multiculturalism is currently being discussed more than ever in Finland.

The purpose of the present study is to examine how national experts working with educational policy make sense of multiculturalism in VET. As cultural diversity and multicultural policies

are increasingly discussed and debated in public and political discourse, there is an urgent need to examine the new meanings, understandings and tensions that inevitably arise from fast-paced changes in the social environment. The participants of this study are responsible, amongst other things, for anticipating and helping to formulate institutional responses to social and environmental changes in the field of vocational education. Social psychology has an important role to play in helping reduce tension and build understanding within an increasingly diverse educational system. Studying how educational policy-making experts understand multiculturalism can help develop more effective institutional responses to anti-immigration sentiment and prejudice.

Social representation theory (SRT) has been selected as the theoretical framework for this study because it offers a compelling and multifaceted explanation for how people make sense of changes in their social surroundings. The increase in cultural diversity introduces unfamiliar and potentially threatening phenomena that necessitate new ways of collective coping. Social representation theory "studies the formation and transformation of meanings, knowledge, and activities of complex social phenomena in and through language and communication, history and culture" (Marková, 2015, p. 444). In addition, social representation theory (Wagner et al., 1999) recognizes that social objects are somewhat stable but simultaneously exist in a state of flux with the potential to change and often doing so as a result of social upheaval. Furthermore, they become manifest in social contexts, i.e. in the interactions between members of intersecting identities, and make themselves apparent through verbal and behavioral expressions (Wagner et al., 1999). The demographic and cultural transformation that is taking place in Finnish education is most apparent in VET because it includes both adult learners and students finishing comprehensive education.

The research data consists of 11 interviews with national experts in vocational education policy. The experts include experienced government officials, lobbyists and principals of VET institutes, all of whom have worked extensively with educational policy on a national level. They have been selected on the basis of their professional experience with policy-making as well as their familiarity with issues related to multiculturalism in VET. In their work the experts have dealt explicitly with the issue of multiculturalism and as a result can be thought of as forming a kind of 'natural group' working on a common project that may

therefore share a social representation of the social object (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999). The way that VET experts working closely with policy make sense of and understand multiculturalism may have far-reaching consequences and implications for the agenda and direction in which the Finnish education system will be developed in the future. In order to understand how VET experts make sense of multiculturalism, this study is based on the following research questions:

1) How does multiculturalism appear in the context of vocational education and training in the VET experts' speech?
2) Does VET experts' speech contain elements that can be interpreted as social representations of multiculturalism?
3) How was multiculturalism anchored and objectified by the VET experts?
4) What kinds of meta-representations emerge in regards to multiculturalism in the VET experts' speech?

The structure of the thesis is as follows: the theory has been divided into two main parts. Chapter 2 begins with an examination of different theoretical conceptions of multiculturalism relevant to this study as well as a brief history of multiculturalism in Finland. After this, the reader is given an overview of the Finnish system of vocational education before moving on to an examination of multiculturalism from the perspective of the recently reformed VET legislation. Chapter 3 focuses on the origin and central concepts of social representations theory. Anchoring and objectification, two of the central methodological tools in SRT, are also examined in this chapter. The chapter ends with a closer look at how SRT has developed over time, including an overview of the concept of meta-representations. Chapter 4 introduces my research questions. Chapter 5 explains the methods used in the study, i.e. how the data was gathered and how respondents were selected. This is followed by a brief methodological overview of qualitative content analysis and an explanation of how the thematic analysis and analysis of social representations was conducted. In Chapter 6 the results are explained and each research question is answered. Chapter 7 provides a synthesis of research results and a commentary about the limitations and potential future directions of this study.

2. MULTICULTURALISM AND THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF FINNISH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

This chapter begins with an examination of the theories and concepts most relevant to social representations of multiculturalism in the context of Finnish vocational education, followed in subchapter two by a brief historical overview of how Finland has become increasingly multicultural since the early 1990s mainly as a result of humanitarian migration. The third subchapter is an examination of Finnish VET from the perspective of multiculturalism. After this a brief overview of the reform of upper secondary vocational education from the perspective of multiculturalism is provided to further contextualize the study.

2.1 Multiple dimensions of multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is one of the most complex terms in the social sciences, encompassing a wide range of interconnected and overlapping phenomena that can be examined from various disciplinary perspectives. According to Viitakainen (2013), multiculturalism can be either descriptive or normative and, although the two have a tendency to become entangled in public discourse, each has its own implications and corresponding schools of thought. Descriptive multiculturalism is a statement of fact according to which different cultures and cultural groups exist within one society. No claims, value judgments, policy recommendations or other such things follow from describing this state of affairs – it simply states that cultural diversity or the "circumstances of multiculturalism" (Kelly, 2002) exist. It is important to keep in mind that multiculturalism, i.e. the existence of cultural diversity, is not synonymous with migration and migrant groups, although in public discourse they are often lumped together. Cultural diversity can, for example, refer to indigenous cultures or minority religions that have not come from "some other place" (Modood, 2013).

Normative multiculturalism, on the other hand, is essentially a response to this state of affairs, posing the question what, if anything, should society do about cultural diversity? It incorporates a wide variety of positions and theories which are all based on the affirmation of cultural diversity as acceptable, even desirable, and, at the very least, not something to be gotten rid of (Viitakainen, 2013). From this perspective, multiculturalism is an ideology that has been defined in research in different ways. Kauff and colleagues (2013), for example, refer to multicultural ideology not merely as public acknowledgement and acceptance of cultural diversity but also as the validation and celebration of these differences. This ideology steers multicultural policy. It is also important to bear in mind that there can be a difference between the realities of lived multiculturalism and how multiculturalism is spoken about publicly.

The state responds to cultural diversity through its multicultural policy. This is where the issue becomes complicated because there is no shortage of policy alternatives and many of them are in total disagreement. Taylor (1994), for example, argues that multicultural policy should be informed by a "politics of recognition". Because an individual's identity, self-image and self-regard depend in large part on social recognition (e.g. Honneth, 2014), it follows from this dependency and desire for equal treatment that society should not only recognize different cultures but also show them value within certain parameters. Continuing in the same normative vein, Modood (2013) defines multiculturalism as the political accommodation of all minority cultures, based primarily on race and ethnicity in addition to nationality, aboriginality and religion. He makes an argument for allowing different minority-specific rights and emphasizes the importance of providing the necessary prerequisites for political and social integration. For Verkuyten (2007, p. 281) the sheer number of different "actors, contexts, interpretations and usages of the term" means no single view of multiculturalism should even be assumed.

The fact that 'multiculturalism' and 'multicultural' are used ubiquitously in different academic, political and colloquial settings creates confusion (Verkuyten, 2007). A range of qualifying adjectives has been crafted to demarcate specific meanings, most prescribing what is the preferred normative stance: 'critical' multiculturalism (May & Steeler, 2010) is differentiated from 'liberal' multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 1995), which is different from

‘cosmopolitan’ or ‘plural’ (Hollinger, 2000) multiculturalism. There is a great deal of variety in terms of the contents and implications of these different denominations, which also has implications for education in the context of multiculturalism. For example, ‘critical multicultural education’ is a response to the perceived limitation of ‘multicultural education’ (cf. Darder, 1991). Some social theorists argue that due to its innate essentialism, the term ‘multiculturalism’ itself should be abandoned altogether in favor of something more allowing for fluidity and hybridity, for example ‘interculturality’ (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006).

From a historical perspective, the term “multiculturalism” first emerged in the 1960s in Anglophone countries as a response to the cultural needs of non-European migrants (Modood, 2013; Verkuyten, 2007). Prior to this, ethnocultural diversity was generally considered a threat to political stability and something that needed to be discouraged through public policies of assimilation and institutionalized marginalization of minorities (Glazer, 1997). The replacement of overtly discriminatory policies with a more accommodating approach to diversity has since become the norm in most Western liberal democracies, as evidenced in cross-national measurements of how multicultural policies have been adopted in various countries (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013). This is not to say, however, that changes have been uniform or developed in a linear sequence. With their long histories as traditional countries of immigration, Canada, Australia and the USA have been at the forefront of government-implemented multicultural policies since the early 1970s. Migrants in Western Europe, on the other hand, find it more difficult to identify and “belong” because, despite the enduring legacy of colonialism, receiving immigrants is not as strongly a part of the national narrative of these countries (Verkuyten, 2007).

Normative multiculturalism has suffered a public backlash in recent years, and as a result politicians in various countries have begun, at least on a rhetorical level, to adopt a more critical stance emphasizing civic integration (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013). The growth in cultural and ethnic diversity in Western countries has been associated with decreasing social trust and increasing social isolation (Putnam, 2007), although the available evidence is inconclusive (Hooghe et al., 2009). Multiculturalism as a political doctrine has come under scrutiny in recent years as governments search for an antidote to an increasingly polarized political atmosphere and proponents of multiculturalism watch in horror as anti-immigrant

populist movements continue to make substantial electoral victories. Perhaps the best examples of this tide of disillusionment can be found in the political rhetoric of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister David Cameron who, after years of speaking on behalf of it, both made a public about-face at the beginning of the decade and began describing multiculturalism as having 'failed' (Merkel, 2010; Cameron, 2011).

In the Finnish language, multiculturalism can be directly translated into 'monikulturalismi' or 'monikultturismi'. The benefit of such a translation is that it retains the -ism ending, which carries with it the connotation of being a political or ideological doctrine. However, for this same reason it has a clumsy and somewhat negative sound to it and is not in common use. In fact, following European trends, some rightwing anti-immigrant activists have appropriated 'monikultturismi' as an umbrella term for the political doctrine that they are struggling against (cf. Immonen, 2017). The far more common translation is 'monikulttuurisuus', which conveys a descriptive stance on the existence of cultural diversity (Viitakainen, 2013). In the same way as in English, it is common in the Finnish language to qualify 'monikulttuurisuus' with specific demarcations, for example 'monikulttuurinen yhteiskunta' (*multicultural society*) or 'monikulttuurinen koulutus' (*multicultural education*) for a more specific context.

In this study, the Finnish VET experts were asked about multiculturalism (*monikulttuurisuus*) as a general term open to interpretation, which could include both normative and descriptive dimensions. Cultural diversity (*kulttuurinen moninaisuus)* was not used because it is a relatively rare term in the context of VET. The idea was to use an open-ended, commonsense term to which the participants could attach different meanings as they saw fit.

2.2 Multiculturalism in Finland

Finland is often portrayed as a monoculture with an extremely homogeneous population and almost no immigrants (Tervonen, 2014). In recent years, historical research has challenged this image by bringing to light alternative histories of women, minorities and other underprivileged groups in Finnish society (cf. Häkkinen & Peltola, 2005). As a result, the hegemonic nationalist narrative and myth of monoculturalism has been subjected to extensive

criticism and is no longer as self-evident as it once was (Tervonen, 2014). Despite the recent introduction of critical perspectives, it is clear that Finland has a significantly shorter and more limited history in regards to hosting migrants compared to other Western European countries.

Finland has historically been a country of emigration rather than immigration. The first major wave of international migrants came to Finland only after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Prior to this, international migration mainly consisted of Vietnamese refugees and other smaller groups that arrived in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In addition to the arrival of ethnic (Ingrian) Finns from Russia and Estonia in the early 1990s, humanitarian migrants escaping the Somali civil war and the violent dissolution of the former Yugoslav Republic also began arriving. Unlike most other Western European countries where migrants began to arrive in large numbers in the 1960s and 1970s primarily looking for work, the roots of international migration in Finland are largely humanitarian as well as based on family unification (OECD, 2018a).

In 2017 there were 385 000 persons with a foreign background in Finland, defined by Official Statistics of Finland (OSF) as persons whose both parents or only known parent were born abroad. Of this group, 84% are first-generation foreign-born and 16% are second-generation foreign-born. While the foreign-born made up only 1% of the Finnish population in 1990, in 2016 they accounted for almost 6.5% (OSF, 2018). The per capita growth of foreign-born individuals residing in Finland has been amongst the fastest in the OECD countries (OECD, 2018b), although it is still modest when measured in total numbers. Russians and Estonians continue to make up the largest foreign-born groups. Iraqis have recently surpassed Somalis as the third largest group. The amount of migrants from Afghanistan, India, Thailand, and Vietnam has also increased in the last decade.

The multiculturalization of Finland is part of a larger re-orientation towards the West that began in the early 1990s and culminated with Finland joining the European Union in 1995. In the first years of the new millennium Finland received global recognition for its high standard of living, IT business and education system, undergoing an economic boom that continued until the sudden collapse of the global financial markets in 2008. The nine-year recession that

followed brought with it the rise of anti-immigrant populists as a major political force as well as increasing economic and social polarization. Rapid changes in the political and social landscape over the last 20 years have forced Finland to face a new host of challenges, of which accommodating and orientating to the needs of people from diverse cultural backgrounds is one of the most pressing.

The Finnish education system is struggling to keep up with the pace of cultural and demographic change in the student population. The amount of Finnish-born children of migrants in 2016 is more than ten times what it was in 1995 (OECD, 2018a). A growing body of evidence shows that the Finnish education system has been unable to produce the kinds of results for students with a migrant background that originally made it into a global leader in education (cf. Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2015; Pirinen, 2015; Valtiontalouden tarkastusvirasto, 2015). Furthermore, the educational pathways of students with migrant backgrounds appear to be segregating from their Finnish peers, with over-representation in dropout rates, not completing a secondary education and not continuing into higher education (Kilpi-Jakonen, 2017; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017b). There is increasing pressure to improve the labor market outcomes of migrants through integration training and vocational education, especially for migrant groups that have the most difficulties entering the work force.

2.3 Multiculturalism and Finnish vocational education and training

Finnish vocational education and training has an annual budget of 1,7 billion euros, making it one of the largest government expenditures in the Ministry of Education and Culture's administrative branch. Finnish VET is publicly funded and provided by municipalities, municipal education and training consortiums, public bodies and endowments. The number of education providers has decreased in recent years, reducing access to VET especially in rural areas. There are currently 140 education providers across Finland, most of them operating in urban areas where migrants also tend to be concentrated (OSF, 2017b; Lappi & Portin, 2017).

Section two of the newly-reformed Vocational Education and Training Act (531/2017) states that the purpose of vocational qualifications and vocational education is to:

> *"... improve and maintain the population's vocational knowledge, provide opportunities for demonstrating competence regardless of where it has been acquired, develop employment and economic life and to respond to its skills needs, to improve employment, to provide competence for entrepreneurship and the constant upkeep of work and functional ability as well as support life-long learning and professional growth. The purpose of education as provided in this Act is furthermore to promote the completion of qualifications or their units."* (Note: translated by the researcher)

The legislation makes it clear that the primary role of VET is to provide tools and opportunities for students from all backgrounds to integrate into the labor market. For some students, a vocational qualification is just one phase between comprehensive school and tertiary education while for others it is the only qualification that they will complete in their lifetime. Ensuring that all students are equipped with core competences for life-long learning such as adequate math and literacy skills is critical for maintaining the educational level and corresponding employability of the adult population (Musset, 2015). This is especially important for adult migrants who are often at a significant disadvantage due to low starting level of education and lack of Finnish-language skills (OECD, 2018b).

There are three types of qualifications that can be completed through VET: vocational upper secondary qualifications (*ammatillinen perustutkinto*), further vocational qualifications (*ammattitutkinto*) and specialist vocational qualifications (*erikoisammattitutkinto*). Further and specialist vocational qualifications are meant for adult learners with prior working life experience. Vocational education and training is divided into ten different fields of education ranging from agriculture and forestry to humanities and art, with a total of 164 individual VET qualifications, of which 43 are vocational upper secondary qualifications, 65 are further vocational qualifications and 56 are specialist vocational qualifications. The large amount of options makes VET highly compartmentalized and difficult to navigate, especially for students from a migrant background who have less access to the kind of social capital that is important for making long-term decisions about education compared to their Finnish-origin counterparts (Karppinen, 2007).

Students with a migrant background are over-represented in the fields of health and welfare and technology, while under-represented in many others (Lappi & Portin, 2017). According to Kalalahti and colleagues (2017), students from a migrant background face a much more complex and multidimensional situation than their Finnish-origin counterparts when confronted with upper secondary education choices. The establishment of VALMA (*ammatilliseen koulutukseen valmentava koulutus*) preparatory education for vocational training has been one of the main systemic responses to ease transitions and is particularly important for students from a migrant background.

It usually takes students three years of full-time study to complete a vocational upper secondary qualification, the scope of which is 180 competence points (*osaamispiste*). Most young students choose to complete their upper secondary vocational qualifications at vocational institutions while apprenticeship training (*oppisopimus*) and competence-based qualifications (*näyttötutkinto*) are generally meant for adults in working life. Vocational institutes are known for having very practical instruction that is designed to meet the needs of working life. Learning takes place flexibly either in vocational institutes, through distance learning or a combination of multiform institutional, on-the-job and distance learning. On-the-job training is especially important for adult students from a migrant background because they have an acute need for building working life connections and learn Finnish language through real-life interaction (OECD, 2018b).

In 2017 there were a total of 326 952 students in vocational education (OSF, 2017b), of whom two thirds are adult learners. It is clear from statistics that vocational education is the primary choice for upper secondary education amongst foreign language speakers (students who speak some other language than Finnish, Swedish or Saami at home). Foreign language speakers are five times more likely to study in upper secondary vocational education compared with upper secondary general education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017b). As the migrant population has grown and a new generation of Finns whose parents are foreign-language speakers has come of age, foreign-language speakers now account for approximately 8% of Finnish VET students (Lappi & Portin, 2017).

In Finland, multiculturalism is more or less synonymous with migrants and migration. Demographic information about students is the main entry point for forming a coherent picture of the multicultural reality of VET. However, due to the inevitable overlap of language, nationality, citizenship, immigration status, family background and so forth, the line between Finns and non-Finns is far from clear-cut. There is no single universal indicator for migrants in use. Different Finnish authorities collect information about migration for different purposes and use different metrics for their statistics. In the education sector, mother tongue is often used as an indicator of migrant background because this information provides the most diverse picture and is easily available (Lappi & Portin, 2017). Second-generation migrants are difficult to locate in the statistics, which is one of the problems with using reported mother tongue as an indicator of foreign. According to Kilpi (2010) approximately 40% of students with at least one migrant parent have been registered with Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue. It is important to note that aside from official classifications, people can hold multiple intersecting identities that are not reflected in their official documentation.

At the same time as the cultural diversity of the student body has increased, so has the need for special support. Approximately 20% of students completing a vocational upper secondary qualification in 2016 had a need for special support (OSF, 2017a). Students from a migrant background generally require more special support compared to their peers whose parents were born in Finland (Lappi & Portin, 2017; Honkanen & Nuutila, 2018). Students from a migrant background pose a new challenge for the steering of education, because they often require multiple types of support simultaneously: additional support in learning Finnish, support for catching up in terms of basic skills in math and literacy, support in dealing with socio-emotional issues as well as support related to specific learning disabilities (Selkivuori & Torikka, 2018).

2.4 Multiculturalism in the reform of Finnish vocational education and training

VET is the nexus between the education and working life. Experts working with policy-making develop and co-create the legislative, institutional and organizational architecture on

which the lived reality of multiculturalism is played out. Understanding the reform of vocational upper secondary education is important because it is the main instrument of multicultural educational policy in VET. Furthermore, the reform completely transformed VET experts' institutional, legislative and organizational landscapes (Räisänen & Goman, 2018). The VET reform that began in the autumn of 2015 is the single largest educational reform since the creation of universities of applied science in the early 1990s (Sivistysvaliokunta, 2017; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017a). One of the central objectives of the reform was to create a system that allows for more personalized support for students from diverse backgrounds, particularly students with a migrant background.

The reform of vocational upper secondary education was listed as the second key project (*kärkihanke*) in the Knowledge and Education agenda of the Strategic Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government (PMO, 2015). In terms of magnitude and ambition, however, it was by far the administration's largest reform in the educational sector. The VET reform marked an exceptionally strong and determined effort to transform the vocational education system, which had been in a state of crisis since the previous administration's failed attempt at reform. According to the Prime Minister's Office's Strategic Programme (2015), the goal of the VET reform was to create a competence-based, customer-oriented and efficient system of vocational education and training by:

- eliminating overlaps in education and barriers between vocational education for young people and adults
- merging the provision of education, its funding and steering into a coherent package under the Ministry of Education and Culture
- encouraging education providers to intensify their activities
- increasing learning in the workplace and reforming apprenticeship training by easing the administrative and financial burden of employers

The main tool of the reform was the Government Bill for the Vocational Education and Training Act (HE 39/2017). The overview of the current legislative situation in VET at the beginning of the Bill is based on a review of key concepts and themes. In general, the nature

of the Bill is highly technical and specialized and explicitly identifies only a very narrow range of social issues. For example, the term ‘multicultural’ does not appear even once in the Bill, nor do related terms such as ‘cultural diversity’, ‘tolerance’ etc. To compare, ‘marginalization’ – one of the most used terms in contemporary educational discourse and the prevention of which is a top priority at the Ministry of Education and Culture – appears only five times in the entire 545-page text.

Multiculturalism is most apparent in those parts of the Bill where migrants and migrant education are referred to. Students with a migrant background are identified in the introduction as one of the main target groups requiring additional social support to succeed in education and working life. However, it is important to understand that the logic of the new legislation is not based on the identification of particular groups but rather on responding to all students individually. In Chapter 3 of the Bill where the main objectives and propositions are presented, vocational education is recognized as playing an important role in the social integration as well as quick and effective labor market integration of persons with a migrant background. There are also more general references to ensuring equality and equity between individuals and areas as well as strengthening social integrity, civic engagement and wellbeing throughout the text.

The reform of vocational education happened to coincide with the most recent large-scale development in the migrant situation in Finland and Europe: the so-called 2015 refugee crisis. Approximately 32 400 individuals - mostly Iraqi and Afghani nationals - arrived in Finland seeking asylum. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland’s Government Integration Programme for 2016–2019 and the Government Resolution on a Government Integration Programme outline the official response to this unprecedented situation in Finnish migration history. Part of the response to the sudden ten-fold increase in asylum seekers was the appointment of a working group in the Ministry of Education and Culture to identify the various problems faced by migrants within its administrative branch and come up with proposals to improve educational tracks and facilitate integration (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). The working group made a series of reports highlighting the situation of migrants in the new legislation and in the educational sector in general.

According to the latest report published by the working group (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019), the new legislation supports the educational pathways of students with a migrant background in many different ways. Individual skills needs are now met more flexibly through individual study paths. At the center of this new individualized approach is each student's right to a personal competence development plan (PCDP). Recognizing prior knowledge and skills helps ensure that each student only studies the things in which he or she has no prior competence. Furthermore, the PCDP determines the kind of guidance and support each student requires so that he or she can progress flexibly at his or her own pace. The PCDP is also critical for planning which learning environments are optimum for each student – whether it is most appropriate to acquire missing competence in a vocational education institution, apprenticeship, workplace or a combination of the above.

According to the working group, another way in which the reform has benefited students with a migrant background is by making it faster and easier to enter vocational education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). The continuous application process is now the primary channel to VET for all students and not just adults, easing transitions between integration training for migrants and vocational education. The joint application process is meant for those who have completed comprehensive school in the spring as well as those who have no upper secondary qualification, a group amongst which students from a migrant background are clearly over-represented (OECD, 2018b; Kilpi-Jakonen 2017). In addition, the general language proficiency requirement, a major structural obstacle for students with a migrant background seeking to enter VET, was removed as a criterion for admission in the new legislation (cf. Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016).

Learning at the workplace is especially important for adult migrants because they often lack working life contacts and experience in Finland (OECD, 2018a). The new legislation also promotes work-based learning, compelling VET providers to develop better working life networks and connections. The idea is to facilitate students' transition from vocational training into working life after completing a vocational qualification or unit (OECD, 2018b). The final main development for migrants in the Bill was the introduction of so-called "studies supporting learning skills" (*opiskeluvalmiuksia tukevat opinnot*), available for all students completing a vocational qualification. The wording of the legislation makes it clear that these

studies are primarily intended for students with language difficulties and an insufficient base level of education because they are at an increased risk of dropping out.

VET is one of the main channels through which Finnish society and working life is becoming more culturally diverse. Over the last twenty years, multiculturalism has developed into a natural part of VET, which is now reflected in the newly reformed legislation where there is a strong focus on building personalized learning pathways rather than targeting different groups with specific steering instruments. Focusing more and more on individuals at the expense of target groups has long-reaching social and political implications and was one of the most contentious parts of the VET reform (e.g. Räisänen & Goman, 2018). The participants in this study have closely followed and participated in national policy-making during the past decade when cultural diversity in VET has increased rapidly. It is interesting to see how experts working closely with VET make sense of such a multifaceted and complex phenomenon as multiculturalism because their understanding may reflect and influence how VET will be developed in the future.

3. SOCIAL REPRESENTATION THEORY

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the origins and central concepts in social representation theory. The second section is about the intersection of theory and methodology, and focuses on anchoring and objectifying. In the third section I describe how social representation theory has developed since its inception and examine some of the main criticisms of the theory that have been put forth. The metarepresentational nature of social representations is also introduced in this last section because it is a central part of the theoretical framework that has informed this study.

3.1 Central concepts in social representation theory

Serge Moscovici (1925-2014) first introduced social representation theory (SRT) to the world in the early 1960s when behaviorism was still the dominant paradigm in social psychology. Along with other sociocultural approaches, SRT challenged what it felt to be the reductionism of the individualist orientation stifling social psychology (Sammut et al., 2015). The common thread of this sociocultural critique was to argue that human activity is inherently social and agentic and that the way humans interpret events and orientate to the world around them depends on the cultural and political context in which they live (Sammut et al., 2015). Moscovici along with other proponents of a more sociocultural approach argued that social relations, communication, and society are central to social psychological inquiry. Prior to this they were thought to belong more to the adjoining but strictly separate fields of sociology and anthropology (Jodelet, 2008). Since people do not only know things as individuals but also as members of groups and citizens in modern society, Moscovici (1984) asserts that it is the duty of social psychology to bridge the gap between sociology and psychology and explain how society itself thinks.

In the 60 years since it was first introduced, social representation theory has attracted worldwide attention and generated several research traditions. It has also attracted its share of criticism, primarily because the dynamic relationship between social structure and individual agency that it puts forth has been difficult to integrate with US-American and British social psychology (Voelklein & Howarth, 2005). Despite criticism, which Moscovici himself welcomed and readily engaged with, SRT continues to open new avenues of inquiry and inspire inventions and innovations (Jodelet, 2008).

The classic definition of social representations states that they are:

> *"…a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function; first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social*

> *exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history*." (Moscovici 1973, p. xiii)

In short, social representations make it possible for people to master their material and social worlds and to communicate. They are attempts by individuals and groups to make the world intelligible, both to themselves and others by connecting abstract and new phenomena to that with which they are already familiar. Moscovici (1984) argues that the fundamental task of social psychology is to understand how ideas are transmuted into reality. SRT aims to describe and explain the symbolic coping that becomes necessary when the life-course of a particular social group is disturbed by some new phenomena, idea or event (Wagner et al., 1999). It is both a theory and a methodology that allows social psychologists to explore the multitude of diverse and competing thoughts permeating the thinking society in which we are immersed (cf. Sakki et al., 2014; Howarth, 2006).

The intellectual history of social representation theory can be traced back to the French anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, whose ideas about the so-called "primitive mind" had a huge influence on 20th century social science. Levy-Bruhl's anthropological inquiries into the formation of logic in the human mind inspired both Émile Durkheim's sociology and the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget. According to Jodelet (2008), in his French-language text "The first article", Moscovici (2003) describes how he initially came across the term "representation" while searching for the right concept to describe the set of problems that he had identified in his critical appraisal of social psychology. While the concept of "collective representations" originated in Émile Durkheim's sociological thought, Moscovici was indirectly influenced by it through Piaget's theoretical concepts of symbolic thinking and moral judgment (Moscovici & Marková,1998; Sakki, 2010). Pursuing his interest in studying how adults think, Moscovici returned to the Durkheimian roots of Piaget's work and began to formulate a different kind of epistemology based on 'social' rather than 'collective' representations.

Moscovici felt that the hegemonic and static nature of Durkheim's collective representations was insufficient to account for the diversity and dynamism of thought in modern society (Duveen, 2001). Collective representations as understood by Durkheim were produced by a

single source of authority, highly resistant to change and tied together all the members of a society. Modern societies are in turn marked by heterogeneity of ideas and people (Taylor, 1994). People and groups do not share the same or even similar ideas, nor do these remain stable across generations. In developing his theory, Moscovici emphasized that the socially communicable and malleable nature of representations as well as the critical agency of human beings in contesting and resisting them were hallmarks of modern society. In contrast to Durkheim, Moscovici allows for volitional, purposive thought. Marková (2012) argues that Moscovici took Durkheim's concept of collective representations and re-fitted it for use in the anthropology of culture in modern society.

The springboard of social representation theory is Moscovici's (1961/2008) classic and highly original book-length study, *Psychoanalysis: Its image and its public*, in which he sets out to explain how psychoanalysis entered the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of France in the 1950s. When psychoanalysis is first introduced to the general public, it is so disturbing in its unfamiliarity and implications that people are forced to come up with new ways of thinking in order to make sense of it. Through questionnaires and systematic content analysis of preferred mass media outlets of three ideologically defined subgroups, Moscovici (1961/2008) demonstrates how Catholic conservatives, Communists and urban liberals understand psychoanalysis in totally different ways. The preferred media of each subgroup re-presents psychoanalysis to its followers based on what is already familiar and acceptable to them which in turn informs how these same audiences understand and appropriate different psychoanalytic concepts into their everyday thinking.

Moscovici (1961/2008) identifies diffusion, propagation and propaganda as three distinct communication genres that the subgroups employ to cope with the introduction of psychoanalysis. Each communication genre mediates social knowledge and has its own particular process, contents and consequences. Moscovici describes the way in which psychoanalysis is introduced to the urban-liberal milieu as *diffusion*, because it is presented as a kind of novelty for well-educated people to explore. In the French Catholic milieu, there is a balancing-act between moderate acceptance of certain parts of psychoanalysis but a rejection of its most sacrilegious theories on human sexuality. Moscovici dubs this *propagation*. In the communist milieu, psychoanalysis was characterized in terms of being incompatible and

ideologically antagonistic with Marxism. Moscovici refers to this genre of communication as *propaganda*. The different communicative genres employed by the ideologically defined media outlets reflect their respective positions in the cultural struggle over the meaning and value of psychoanalysis (Moscovici & Marková, 1998).

Social representation theory is fundamentally a theory of social knowledge (Marková, 2003) and social conflict (Moscovici & Marková, 1998; Elceroth et al., 2011). Phenomena and events become knowable through concerted action and discourse taking place in the context of social relationships and communication (Wagner et al., 1999). Even a person's most private thoughts are assembled with tools and techniques of thinking created through exposure to others. At the center of SRT is the so-called semiotic triangle of Ego-Alter-Object (Moscovici, 1984). Essentially what this means is that a social entity (Ego), for example a person or a group, can only know something (Object) in relation to another social entity (Alter). Consequently, the nature of knowledge is fundamentally relational; knowing must involve more than a single mind (cf. Marková, 2003).

Different positions in regards to a particular social representation shape and inform one another with their respective modes of knowledge and communication. In her article on the epistemological significance of SRT, Marková (2008, p. 479) comments: "It is not simply that different groups and different social contexts affect what people represent. It is the interactive interdependence between them that produces different styles of thinking and communicating." Moscovici (1961/2008) demonstrates how in the case of psychoanalysis, the subgroups' various understandings dialogically co-create one another; i.e. what the subgroups think about other relevant issues, and how they position themselves towards other groups, influences how they make sense of psychoanalysis. For the subgroups, understanding psychoanalysis is not a neutral or objective process, nor is it a purely cognitive task, since to "know" something means relating it to other things that are also known. Since life in modern society is marked by the existence of multiple competing ways of knowing (Duveen, 2001), in order for psychoanalysis to become intelligible, each subgroup must build a suitable place for it in their respective worldview.

Social representation theory is an attempt to explain how scientific or expert knowledge turns into common, ordinary knowledge (Moscovici & Marková, 1998). Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl differed in their conceptions regarding the evolution of thought from a 'primitive' state to one of modernity (Moscovici & Marková, 1998). For Durkheim, this development is linear and proceeds in stages while for Lévy-Bruhl, the evolution of thought from 'primitive' to 'modern' is antithetical, with one pattern of thinking being substituted by the other. Jean Piaget's developmental psychology with its uninterrupted continuity from child to adult is a logical continuation of Durkheim's rationalism. Both Durkheim and Piaget subscribed to the ascent theory of knowledge according to which thinking developed in a linear fashion from a pre-rational state into a state of rationality (Marková, 2003). In this view, scientific thinking is heralded as the pinnacle of human intellectual achievement and made into the yardstick against which other lesser forms of thinking are compared.

Moscovici sought to rehabilitate common sense thinking, which had until then been largely derided by social psychologists as erroneous, unreliable and even dangerous (Marková, 2015; Marková, 2017). In his study of psychoanalysis, Moscovici (1961/2008) demonstrates how a particular form of specialized scientific thinking entered everyday life in 1950s France, eventually being adopted into common sense and transforming it. It would be a mistake to assume that lay people simply recreate less sophisticated caricatures of professional and scientific knowledge to employ in their everyday thinking (Marková, 2012). Common sense is not just a vulgarized version of scientific thinking but is in essence a sense-making process rich with meaning, offering us a perspective into social thinking as it takes place in real life. For Moscovici (1981, p. 186) "social representations are phenomena that are linked with a special way of acquiring and communicating knowledge, a way that creates realities and common sense". The validity of common sense is of critical epistemological importance to social representation theory. To exclude common sense from social psychological inquiry is to render as unimportant most of the socially and culturally mediated thinking taking place both within and between people.

In his early writings Moscovici (1981; 1984) used the terms 'reified' and 'consensual' in reference to two distinct ways of knowing and thinking. In the reified universe thought proceeds from premise to conclusion and there is an effort to impose a solid order on things.

Reified thinking explains the world independently of people, is indifferent to individuality and identity and views society as a meritocratic system of specialized professional roles and classes. The consensual universe on the other hand is characterized by negotiation and communication between free and equal individuals, who make up the world together with their thoughts and voices. In the consensual universe thinking involves collective memory, folklore and consensus. Moscovici does not equate the consensual with the irrational, maintaining that it is rational on its own terms (Moscovici & Marková, 1998). According to Moscovici (1984, pp. 20-21), it is up to the sciences to investigate the reified universe while social representations deal with the consensual.

Nowadays the distinction between the reified and consensual universes is less pronounced and they are seen more as mutually interdependent (Marková, 2008). Separating the scientific or expert knowledge of the reified universe from the commonsense knowledge of the consensual universe is not always easy. In this study, VET experts are neither amateurs nor experts when it comes to multiculturalism. While they have to deal with multiculturalism in their work as national policy experts, they are not experts in the sense of academics or researchers seeking to define or explore the term. Studying the VET experts' thinking from a social representations perspective is justified since they can be thought of as forming a natural group with interconnected professional and personal perspectives on multiculturalism in the context of education and policy-making.

Commonsense and expertise cannot be easily separated since people and groups make sense of social representations on multiple levels simultaneously. Moscovici (1961/2008) coined the term *cognitive polyphasia* to describe the coexistence of different modalities of knowledge. People and groups are in the habit of adopting multiple forms of thinking depending on the context. Not only this but people and groups tend to employ multiple forms of thinking even in the same context, some of which may be blatantly contradictory. According to Jovchelovitch (2002, p. 2), cognitive polyphasia refers to "a state in which different kinds of knowledge, possessing different rationalities live side by side in the same individual or collective". In the conversation between Moscovici & Marková (1998), Moscovici asserts that it is a totally normal part of everyday life for people to employ diverse and even opposite ways of thinking; the logical or cognitive unity of mental life is more of a desire on the part of

psychologists rather than the true state of affairs. Experts do not only draw upon professional information but also their own personal experiences and the different facts and opinions that they have encountered in the media or in relevant conversations in their social milieus.

Serge Moscovici (1984, p. 23) emphasizes the prescriptive power of social representations, stating that they ”impose themselves upon us with irresistible force. This force is a combination of a structure which is present before we have even begun to think, and of a tradition which decrees *what* we should think”. In the case of psychoanalysis, Moscovici argues that its effect on our thinking and the thinking of those around us became inescapable once it entered the mental life of modern society. Psychoanalysis surrounds and permeates our thinking regardless of how any individual may feel about it (Moscovici, 1984). The same can be said of multiculturalism; it is practically impossible to avoid its influence, since so much of modern life is permeated by the variation and diversity resulting from intercultural exchange and globalization (Duveen, 2001). Regardless of what one may think of it, increasing cultural diversity is a defining feature of modernity, at least in Western liberal democracies (Taylor, 1994). Even in places with limited cultural diversity, multiculturalism is present in global media as well as in how and what people talk about. Social representations inform social reality to the point of constituting it (Moscovici, 1984). It is critical to note, however, that although a social representation may be quite ubiquitous and self-evident, this does not mean it is uniform or that it cannot be challenged or modified (Volklein & Howarth, 2005).

A dynamic struggle is taking place between so-called commonsense and scientific thinking in regards to multiculturalism in Finland. Those that oppose the current political doctrine of multiculturalism refer to both common sense and expertise (e.g. Immonen, 2017). Supporters of multiculturalism also refer to common sense, for example that it is common sense to honor international obligations or take in migrant workers to fill the labor shortage that is hindering economic growth in Finland. Different sides have their own experts and versions of common sense. Generally speaking, it could be said that proponents of multiculturalism have a monopoly in terms of academic and institutional credibility while opponents have monopolized the so-called “people’s voice”, i.e. a populist version of common sense. The profusion of available scientific and lay knowledge about multiculturalism circulating in Finnish public and private discourse makes it very difficult, perhaps impossible, to find any

‘neutral’ position because politicization has put neutrality itself under question. Any position, regardless of institutional authority or expert knowledge, can be legitimized and de-legitimized depending on if it is perceived as being for or against multiculturalism. It is interesting to see how this polarized backdrop affects the way national policy-making experts make sense of multiculturalism. VET experts’ different ways of knowing can give us insight into the multiple interconnected meanings that multiculturalism occupies in contemporary Finnish society, particularly in the context of education.

3.2 Anchoring and objectification in social representation theory

Anchoring and objectification are simultaneously theoretical as well as methodological tools (e.g. Wagner et al. 1999; Sakki et al., 2014). On one hand they are theoretical formulations of how social representations function and on the other hand they are methodological blueprints through which social representations can be identified. This conceptual murkiness has been one of the main targets of criticism (Voelklein & Howarth 2005), which will be addressed in in the next subchapter. An exhaustive analysis of anchoring and objectification is beyond the scope of this thesis – however, I will briefly outline the two concepts and connect them to the development of different schools of thought in social representation theory.

Anchoring is the process through which something unfamiliar is given meaning by adopting it into a pre-existing hierarchy of relationships. For Moscovici (1984, p. 37-38) the ”dynamics of familiarization” is an integral part of the smooth functioning of the consensual universe’s shared logic. The consensual universe is replete with social representations. Moscovici (1984, p. 38) explains the disruptive significance of the unfamiliar through the example of a proverbial “man in the street” coming into contact with the mentally handicapped or with someone belonging to another culture. Unable to come up with a name or a category for the person or phenomena he is confronted with, the man is prevented from reacting in his usual way and feels a sense of incompleteness and randomness. Moscovici (1984) argues that when a person is faced with someone out of the ordinary who is both like and unlike him, he is bewildered as though he were seeing something unreal. Anchoring is essentially a process of classifying and naming what is encountered. It may result in someone from another culture

being described in terms of familiar yet expandable categories such as uncultured, barbarian or irrational.

Anchoring does not only take place within the individual mind. The familiar is an internalized and socially constructed backdrop against which the unusual or abnormal can be evaluated. Anchoring brings us back, both collectively and individually, to a secure frame of mind free from strife and contradiction (Moscovici, 1984). Classifying means comparing an unfamiliar social object to a prototype, either through generalization or particularization. Generalizing means reducing the particularity of a phenomenon so that it fits with a prototype, i.e. our idea of what something is supposed to look like. Particularization on the other hand means emphasizing these differences to highlight the incompatibility of the phenomenon with the prototype (Sakki, 2010). Whether taking place through particularization or generalization, classification is never neutral because it assigns value, either positive or negative or a mix of both, which gives the social object an identity in relation to other objects in our cultural matrix (Moscovici, 1981). Examining how the VET experts anchor multiculturalism into their pre-existing hierarchy of relationships allows us to understand the larger social, cultural and historical framework regulating this process of familiarization.

Howarth (2006) argues that rather than consolidating the status quo by providing detailed descriptions of social representations, we should focus on tracing their historical roots, immediate social functions and future implications. One way of doing this is by looking at how people and groups anchor their social representations. Taking Moscovici's example of the man in the street further, we can speculate that as a result of a chance encounter with someone from a different culture, a new representation may begin to emerge, perhaps of "foreigners" as a particular class of people or "multiculturalism" as the political doctrine behind increased cultural diversity. The hierarchy into which this social representation is co-opted does not exist in a vacuum nor does it reside solely within the mind of this particular person. The various shared understandings that the person has formed throughout his life in the context of social relations and habits create the terrain on which social representations take root. For example, if the person anchors 'foreigners' or 'multiculturalism' to de-industrialization and the loss of Finnish blue-collar jobs or criminality and terrorism, his

reaction would probably differ quite radically than if he anchored them to global solidarity, human rights or a religious duty to welcome strangers.

The concept of anchoring has been commented upon and developed by numerous researchers (e.g. Billig, 1988). Perhaps most prominently, Willem Doise's School of Geneva has sought to create a more nuanced theoretical framework for anchoring in social representation theory. SRT has been criticized for assuming heterogeneity in how people understand complicated social objects. Doise and colleagues (1993) argue that while individuals may share common knowledge and views in regards to a particular social issue, this does not mean that all individuals and groups think about it in the same way.

Objectification is the process through which something initially abstract is converted into a concrete form (Moscovici, 1984). Objectifying "domesticates" social objects, transforming the unfamiliar and unperceived into the familiar and obvious. New and difficult-to-grasp concepts, theories and ideas are objectified by constructing and identifying their iconic aspects (Wagner, Elejabarrieta & Lahnsteiner 1995). These form the so-called figurative nucleus that "visibly reproduces a complex of ideas" (Moscovici 1984, p. 50). Not all words can be reproduced as images, because sometimes an image is not readily available and some images are taboo. Examining the relationship complexes of ideas and their associated complexes of images is critical to understanding VET experts' social representations of multiculturalism.

The purpose of an objectification is to symbolize the phenomenon in question (Wagner et al., 1999). A classic example comes from Jodelet's (1991) study of social representations of madness in a French village. Living in close proximity to the mentally ill, villagers used metaphors such as "decay", "curdling like butter" and "souring like milk" to describe mental health. These images were characteristic of the villagers' everyday lives in a rural and agricultural setting, demonstrating that the form an objectification assumes is not arbitrary but depends on historical, cultural and socio-economic conditions.

The villagers in Jodelet's study objectified madness into concrete images but in other circumstances the use of metaphors can be more appropriate. Wagner and his colleagues (1995) demonstrate how research subjects in Austria explained biological conception not in terms of natural science but in terms of gendered sex-role behavior. The biological process of the sperm fertilizing the ovum was explained through metaphors based on stereotypical male and female behavior founded on everyday social experience. Explaining conception in terms of such social and moral reasoning makes it available for discussion – it can be shared and debated amongst non-experts according to the logic of the consensual universe. Something complicated and technical is transformed into something that is "good to think" (Moscovici 1984). This study examines how VET experts make multiculturalism in VET into something "good to think" and how this is shared and communicated.

Moscovici (1984) asserts that in their drive to subdue us, all political and intellectual authorities exploit the awesome human ability to materialize abstractions. A particularly illuminating example from recent political history is the 2009 Swiss referendum on banning the construction of minarets (cf. Ehrkamp, 2017). In an infamous political ad in favor of the ban, minarets were depicted as a cluster of black towers raising up from the Swiss flag, while in the forefront a veiled woman stares directly at the viewer. The ad was accused of employing islamophobic tropes in the form of imagery associated with terrorism, militarism and male domination. The ad managed to capture in a single image the figurative nucleus of some Swiss citizens' anxieties about supposed Islamic expansionism and loss of cultural territory. By combining a few powerful clichés into an instantly recognizable and communicable pattern, the politicians behind the ad successfully exploited the figurative power of the human mind to further their political ends. The above example demonstrates that objectifications are produced through intentional and creative processes and not simply handed down or picked up (Flick, 1995).

3.3 Further developments in social representation theory

Taking stock of the different historical phases in the development of social representation theory, Jodelet (2008) raises important questions about the future. She calls for unity and

cohesion amongst the various theoretical formulations and corresponding applications that have emerged since the publication of Moscovici's (1961/2008) *Psychonalysis, Its image and its public.* She is not alone in doing so - in the last 20 years there have been frequent calls for reckoning and refocusing within SRT (see Howarth, 2006; Marková, 2012). Partially this results from the fact that social representation theory has sparked intense criticism and debate in the field of social psychology that needs to be addressed. Volklein & Howarth (2005) divide the criticisms made against social representation into four main categories: theoretical ambiguity, social determinism, cognitive reductionism and lack of a critical agenda. In this section I will briefly address the charges of theoretical ambiguity, cognitive reductionism and lack of a critical agenda because they are the most relevant for my research subject. After detailing these criticisms I will provide a brief overview of the main schools of thought that have developed around SRT before concluding with an examination of social representations as metarepresentations, the chosen theoretical perspective of this study.

Volklein & Howarth (2005) argue that the main reason why social representation theory has been criticized for theoretical ambiguity is the complexity of the dynamic between agency and structure that it proposes. According to Moscovici (Moscovici & Marková, 1998), individual minds and culture are not separated from one another but exist in a dialogical and mutually transformative relationship. Social representations should therefore be seen as simultaneously social and cognitive processes, residing within the individual mind as well as across minds in society. Raudsepp (2005) goes a step further and argues that the criticism of theoretical ambiguity goes deeper than social structure and individual agency, and is the result of fundamental epistemic differences between the philosophical tradition informing Moscovici's thinking in contrast to British and US-American social psychology. As Marková (2003) has demonstrated, the roots of social representation theory are in dialectical and rationalist epistemology that can be traced back to Hegel. This inevitably puts it at ends with the dominant paradigm in British and US-American social psychology, which is based on Cartesian dualism and empiricist and mechanical epistemology (Volklein & Howarth, 2005).

Social representation theory has also been criticized for being "fragmented and sometimes contradictory" (McKinlay & Potter, 1987). Critics such as Potter & Litton (1985) have claimed that social representations lack a clear definition. The transformative nature of social

representations makes them resistant to exhaustive definitions and, due to their inherent volatility, it makes more sense to "characterize rather than define social representations" (Volkein & Howarth, 2005, p. 8). Part of the theoretical ambiguity surrounding social representations also stems from the fact that Moscovici avoided formulating strict guidelines for testing and operationalizing his theory (Volklein & Howarth, 2005), preferring to leave it open-ended in order to stimulate fresh discoveries (Jodelet, 2008).

Language differences and translation problems have contributed to misunderstandings and misrepresentations around social representation theory (Volklein & Howarth, 2005). Moscovici's original work was only translated into English in 2008, almost half a century after its initial publication in French. During this time, there have been numerous developments and elaborations, both by Moscovici himself and his proponents (for an overview see Jodelet 2008; Marková 2012). These developments have led to a plethora of different theoretical and applicatory directions, many of which have originated in non-English speaking parts of the world, a state of affairs that has further contributed to confusion around the central concepts in SRT and their use.

Critics have accused SRT of being overtly cognitivist, arguing that it does not pay enough attention to social influence (eg. Jahoda, 1988). Volkein & Howarth (2005) point out that anchoring and objectification have been wrongly equated with the concepts of categorization and schemata from the neighboring field of cognitive psychology. In their study on biological conception, Wagner and colleagues (1995) demonstrate that anchoring and objectification are thoroughly social, cultural and ideological in nature. Social representations are also cognitive. Firmly based on a "Hegelian paradigm and the tradition of dialogism" (Volklein & Howarth, 2005) social representations are social *as well as* cognitive processes because cognition itself is socio-cultural in nature (Marková, 2000).

The broad scope of social representations has led to tension and overlap with a number of neighboring concepts. Critics such as Jahoda (1988) question how social representations differ from common sense, ideology or culture. According to Volklein & Howarth (2005), Moscovici created social representation theory in response to what he perceived as the limited utility of overarching sociological concepts such as ideology and culture to explain the social

life of a particular group. Social representation theory is an attempt to connect macro- and micro-social psychological processes with the common thinking and communication of groups as it takes place in everyday life (Marková, 2000). In the same vein, social representation theory has also sought to distinguish itself from opinions, attitudes and stereotypes. Moscovici (Moscovici & Marková, 1998) does not deny the validity or importance of these concepts but maintains that they are insufficient to capture the complex and social nature of human thought on their own.

In their influential paper "Towards a Paradigm for Research on Social Representations", Bauer & Gaskell (1999) bring together many of the different strands of theoretical exploration and research in SRT and offer a unified paradigm for research. They propose that the following seven ideals should be met when studying social representations: "content and process; social milieus, natural groups and intimation; cultivation studies within milieus; multi-method analysis; longitudinal designs at the crossover of cultural projects and trajectories; and the disinterested ethos in researching the content, structure and functions of representations" (Bauer & Gaskell 1999, p. 182). While it is highly unlikely that any one study could meet all of the criteria, these are important to consider when designing a study.

Sakki and colleagues (2014) argue that out of the above methodological prerequisites, the most important one is to examine natural groups instead of taxonomical ones. Taxonomical groups may share external criteria like age and gender but have little in common in terms of shared representations. Natural groups, on the other hand, are defined by the extent to which their members share an object of representation. The experts in this study form a natural group in terms of their shared professional interest in policy-making and multiculturalism in vocational education. However, there exists no official or unofficial bond that would tie all the participants together in a clearly designated group outside of this study. The participants did not form any kind of self-referential group as such, aside from belonging to the relatively close-knit community of people working with vocational education policy. The organizing principle of this natural group is that they have all contributed, in a broad sense, to the "project" of multiculturalism in VET. Bauer and Gaskell (1999) also point out that periods of crisis and conflict are particularly fruitful for social representations research because this is when social fault-lines emerge. The crisis in vocational education combined with the growing

public and political backlash against multiculturalism sets the stage for precisely this type of emergent social fault-line in the VET experts' professional context.

Bauer and Gaskell (1999) propose a "Toblerone"-model for studying social representations. The model is composed of three elements: the object of representation perceived by a minimum of two subjects as well as the "project" of the social representation and its corresponding time-dimension. Project refers to a common frame of reference shared by a group that makes it possible to work together. The model illustrates how social representations are formed together over time, within the context of particular cultural and historical epochs. Groups are inherently unstable – falling apart and re-grouping as time passes and situations change. Furthermore, groups are not uniform in their social representations, meaning there can be a number of different "toblerones" about a single object (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999). The diversity of possible representations combined with an acknowledgement of the time-dimension in the lifespans of groups allows for cultural and historical fluctuation, which is important because social representations are not monolithic and unchanging but periodically reconstitute themselves as the surrounding world changes.

The "project" of VET in general and multiculturalism in particular has a clear chronological dimension to it; i.e. the historical development of a particular education system through institutional and parliamentary decision-making. This is to say that VET and multiculturalism are not only abstractions but also very real political projects with deadlines, changes in the balance of power, competing factions et cetera. The role of the VET experts is to make sense of this on-going project and to influence it in many different ways. Therefore, despite the experts' different goals and ideas, their project is a shared one.

Over the years social representation theory has developed in a number of different directions. In the so-called Aix-en-Provence school, Jean-Claude Abric and his colleagues have explored the structural elements of social representations. According to this view, understanding how a social representation is organized is of the utmost importance to discerning its meaning. Abric (2001, p. 43) defines social representations as a "body of information, beliefs, opinions and attitudes about a given object. These elements are organized and structured so as to constitute a particular type of social cognitive system. This system is made of a central core and an

ensemble of peripheral elements". For Abric and colleagues, the core is the starting point and organizing principle of a social representation, which keeps its meaning stable over time whereas peripheral elements are more malleable and can help social representations transition between different contexts. The structural approach tends to be quantitative and experimental in nature, favoring larger sample sizes in order to adequately distinguish between core and peripheral elements, which makes it impractical for this particular study.

Ivana Marková's (2003) dialogical school of thought represents another major approach to SRT. Drawing heavily on the antinomic nature of Hegelian philosophy, the dialogical approach emphasizes the interrelationship between the individual and the linguistic, epistemological and communicative environment in which he or she lives. The concept of *themata* is critical to this approach: themata reveal the various dualisms and antinomies at the center of social representations. Liu (2004) points out that themata should not be confused with "core elements" in Abric's structural theory, because they are based on rather different epistemological foundations. Nonetheless, both schools endeavor to break social representations down to their constituent elements. The dialogical school of thought has had an important influence on this study because of Marková's contributions to the clarity and depth of social representation theory. However, the present study focuses more on the ideological and political dimension of multiculturalism rather than attempting to uncover linguistic and communicative dichotomies.

According to Howarth (2006, p. 26) "we cannot present a comprehensive understanding of social reality without the recognition of the political". Turning this argument on its head, Guy Elceroth and his colleagues Willem Doise and Stephen Reicher argue in their 2011 paper that we cannot understand political reality without recognizing the social. Politics and social psychology have traditionally been seen as two separate worlds that occasionally overlap. Elceroth et al (2011) criticize the overtly simplistic understanding of human cognition in mainstream research on political psychology. In Elceroth and colleagues' social representations approach, social reality is not taken for granted and neither is the presumed intellectual superiority of experts compared to "irrational" or "stupid" political subjects. Psychology can do more than account for the "mental distortions" of lay people who do not listen to experts. The main thrust of Elceroth and colleagues' (2011) sociocultural critique of

political psychology, is that rather than seeing people as "solitary cognizers" who think in isolation, people should be seen as active agents seeking to make sense of and master their surroundings both individually and collectively.

The above criticisms of traditional political psychology are particularly relevant for the present study, which is concerned with understanding how experts working in a thoroughly political landscape make sense of multiculturalism in VET. As professionals in political, institutional and organizational thinking, the experts are used to juggling between decision-making processes on multiple institutional and organizational levels. At the same time, they have to keep their ear to the ground and understand the "circumstances of multiculturalism" (Kelly, 2002). The VET experts' work at the intersection of social and political reality, where expert knowledge and ordinary people meet one another, makes for an interesting and dynamic subject of research. Especially interesting is trying to understand how the metarepresentational nature of social representations factors into the way experts make sense of multiculturalism in VET.

Elceroth and colleagues (2011) merge social representation theory with elements of social identity theory and apply it to political psychological phenomena to provide a new perspective on power, resistance and conflict. They are careful to define their work as being separate from social representation theory, locating it instead within a larger social representations approach, which they outline as part of a broader intellectual movement that Moscovici's work helped to launch but which now extends beyond it. Their article can be seen as an indirect response to Howarth's (2006) call for further development and refinement of the critical potential of social representation theory. She (2006, p. 21) argues that social representation theory lacks a "thorough exploration of the role of power in the reification and legitimization of 'expert' knowledge systems". While Elceroth et al (2011) do not focus exclusively on the process through which expert knowledge becomes privileged; the interconnected nature of expert knowledge and common sense is still relevant to their work on "the knowledge of politics and the politics of knowledge".

Pointing out that "social psychological knowledge is never disinterested", Howarth (2006, p. 22) makes it plain that social representations not only account for what is taking place in

society but also are instrumental in orientating people towards the future. Elceroth et al elaborate on the inherently political nature of social representations by referring to them as *world-making assumptions* with the potential to change social and material reality. This presents a more comprehensive and engaging answer to the pressing question of "what do social representations *do*?" which Howarth (2006) links with the conceptual vagueness surrounding the theory. World-making assumptions are not limited to or reducible to individuals, but rather are an integral part of the collective future-orientated activity of social groups. Elceroth and colleagues (2011) point out how private thoughts and opinions undergo a qualitative epistemic transformation when linked to common interpretations of shared experience. An individual being denied a job can be put down to bad luck while a group of people being denied work precipitates a sense of discrimination. Collective meaning making is the cornerstone of both explicit and implicit communication and the organizing principle for social action.

Shared knowledge functions as the epistemological foundation for collective political activity and resistance in the face of oppression, as Gina Philogène's (1999) work on the historical development of the term "African American" as a substitute for "Black" demonstrates. Philogène shows how "African American" was introduced as a purposive and thoroughly politicized construction for the express purpose of displacing the term "Black", just as Black had displaced "Negro" before it. Throughout the 20th century there was a conscious, strategic effort on the part of Americans of African ancestry to mobilize and politicize their struggle for recognition, which required uprooting and transforming old conceptions dating back through centuries of slavery and segregation and replacing them with new, self-created ones. None of this would have been possible were it not for the fact that humans make sense of social phenomena together with others in *communities of belief*.

Philogène's (1994) emphasis on naming as manifestation of collective political activity is particularly important for Elceroth et al's (2011) elaboration of metarepresentations. People are aware of what others think and actively take this into consideration when trying to master their social and material realities. We position ourselves strategically within the interpretative grid that is formed around a particular social object by taking into account what significant others, both friend and foe, are thinking and doing. In the case of African-Americans, the

process of re-naming and reclaiming that Philogène describes took place in an extremely hostile and dangerous environment. It is predicated on the existence of a significant body of meta-knowledge concerning the thoughts and beliefs of relevant other communities, such as White Anglo-Saxon Protestants in the Klu Klux Klan. Awareness of others' thinking is not only the cornerstone of individual thinking, it is also vital for survival. We are not only aware of what others think but we are also aware about what they think about our thinking. The capacity for meta-reflection is at the heart of social communication, because it allows us to connect a particular social representation to the identity and belief systems of other groups and to formulate new strategies and actions in relation to other groups and individuals.

The VET experts' work takes place in the context of competing interests in political and institutional milieus and involves employing precisely the type of meta-reflection that Elceroth and colleagues (2011) refer to. In order for a political project such as developing vocational education to better meet the needs of migrant students to succeed, careful consideration must be given to what kind of resistance and conflict could possibly arise in the process and how to deal with it. The VET experts are experts by virtue of their knowledge and experience in understanding and reflecting on the potential consequences of various political maneuvers. This is at the heart of what they are paid to do. As Rochira (2014, p. 260) points out, experts' routinized work practices "provide individuals with social narratives… that act as interpretative grids helping them in making sense of experience and in acting across various social situations." Rochira's social narratives are compatible with Elceroth et al's (2011) conception of social representations as *enacted communication* built on social and institutionalized practices. Social institutions tie together particular narratives and practices. Communicative activity necessarily takes place in the context of culturally and historically created social institutions where social norms have ossified into legitimized practices. The knowledge and experience of the experts in this study has developed within the framework of social and institutional practices in VET.

To summarize, it can be said that the concept of social representations has come a long way since Moscovici's original work was published. Different theoretical and practical traditions have succeed in enlivening and deepening the original concepts, building on their relevance and strengthening their critical position within the field of social psychology. Since its

inception, social representation theory has been concerned with the political dimension of social life. Elceroth et al's formulation of metarepresentations demonstrates an attempt to elaborate and articulate the political nature of social representations and expand the domain of political psychology. Studying VET experts' sense making provides an opportunity for precisely this type of inquiry, since it draws upon multiple interconnected levels of knowing and doing. The experts' position at the nexus of policy-making and policy implementation gives them a unique position from which to discuss collective political activity and the tensions and conflicts inherent in their work. Focusing on the metarepresentational dimension of social representations allows us to look deeper into the VET experts' socially mediated networks of meaning making. It creates a sense of direction when it comes to understanding human activity within the framework of SRT, especially in the context of expert knowledge. Metarepresentations provide a more refined understanding of VET experts' political and ideological orientation towards multiculturalism within the institutional framework of VET.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The subject of the present study is VET experts' social representations of multiculturalism in the context of vocational education and training. The way national experts understand and discuss multiculturalism may have important implications for how multiculturalism factors into educational policy-making and administration in VET and beyond. It is important to keep in mind that the subject of the present study is not multiculturalism as an objective phenomenon but rather how the interviewed experts understand it in the context of VET.

I was interested in tracing the participants' heterogeneous personal, social, and cultural knowledge and experiences related to multiculturalism in vocational education. I was especially interested in examining how the participants anchor and objectify their social representations of multiculturalism in the context of VET. My aim was to trace the different kinds of knowledge (ranging from everyday experiences to professional knowledge and scientific arguments) employed by the participants when responding to my questions. The

research questions do not presuppose the existence of a shared understanding of multiculturalism amongst the participants. It is possible that no social representation of multiculturalism exists or that several may exist rather than one. The study focuses on the following research questions:

1) How does multiculturalism appear in the context of vocational education and training in the VET experts' speech?
2) Does VET experts' speech contain elements that can be interpreted as social representations of multiculturalism?
3) How was multiculturalism anchored and objectified by the VET experts?
4) What kinds of meta-representations emerge in regards to multiculturalism in the VET experts' speech?

I have posed these research questions because they focus on how multiculturalism is understood within a shared professional context by a group of VET experts working closely with policy-making and administration. In the interview questions, multiculturalism is contextualized within the framework of VET but is not reducible to it, allowing for open-endedness and diverse perspectives in the respondents' answers.

In order to identify and interpret social representations of multiculturalism, it is necessary to proceed in phases, first starting with a general descriptive analysis of the data and moving towards particular interpretations of social representations. The descriptive analysis is based on a preliminary thematic analysis of how multiculturalism appeared in the context of vocational education and training in the VET experts' speech. This is dealt with in research question 1. The descriptive framework serves as the foundations for more specific interpretations of social representations in research questions 2-4. The different phases are necessary for a systemic and consistent foundation from which identifying and interpreting social representations is possible.

5. METHODS

The first part of this chapter focuses on the participants of the study as well as the interview data on a general level. The process of data acquisition is explained including how the interviews were organized and carried out. In the second section the methods of thematic content analysis are presented along with the preliminary coding.

5.1 Participants of the study and methods of data acquisition

The research data consisted of 11 semi-structured expert interviews. Interviews are a typical method of choice when studying social representations qualitatively (Flick et al., 2015). The qualitative semi-structured interview was seen to be the most appropriate for studying participants' social representations and for capturing diverse meanings and conceptions involved in the participants' social representations (Flick et al., 2015). Social representations are dynamic entities reflecting participants' personal and professional knowledge and experiences and can be particularly useful when studying how experts think (Rochira, 2014). Interviewing allowed me to listen to the voices of the participants' and engage in sensitive dialogue with them. The semi-structured approach allows for a disciplined way of tracing the participants' social representations while being flexible enough to adapt to participants' responses and let the conversation to proceed naturally (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

The national experts were selected on the basis of their knowledge and professional experience with multiculturalism and policy-making in Finnish vocational education. The general idea was to interview participants from stakeholder organizations in VET who would be willing to reflect critically on their own and others' perspectives towards multiculturalism. Prior to starting this thesis, I worked in a professional role for a number of years as the education policy expert and advocate for the National Union of Vocational Students in Finland - SAKKI ry. It was through this work that I came to know all of the experts, which made it easy to approach them. Based on my prior work experience and networks, I selected participants that I was confident would represent a variety of different perspectives on multiculturalism, policy-making and vocational education and training in general. Twelve

experts were contacted and all agreed to participate in the present investigation despite relatively short notice. One participant cancelled at the last minute due to illness.

The invitations to participate in the interview were sent out in early April and May 2018. The interviewees were contacted directly through their work emails. The invitation to participate consisted of a short description of the study and a polite request for the participants to share their expert knowledge. All of the participants were interviewed individually between April and June 2018. All participants were given a consent form to read through and sign. One copy of this form was given to the participant and I kept the other (Appendix 1). In the informed consent form the participants were promised that the data would be analyzed anonymously and their identities and any sensitive information that possibly emerged would be protected. After they signed the form the participants were informed that the interview would be recorded on two different devices. All participants agreed to the interview being recorded.

Most of the participants had worked with VET for more than a decade. Some participants had worked with VET for more or less their entire professional careers. The age of the participants ranged from 35-70. Out of a total of 11 participants, eight were women and three were men. The participants represent various core interests in VET, from government officials to lobbyists in various stakeholder organizations as well as upper-management in Finnish vocational institutes. All of the interview subjects were tried-and-tested professionals in the field of VET policy and administration meaning and could be seen to have a deep understanding of how VET had developed over the years and the critical contradictions and tensions involved. They all actively followed and participated in policy-making according to their personal, professional and organizational perspectives. Because they represented different interests and perspectives, the respondents also differed in the way they saw the relationship between VET and multiculturalism.

The respondents varied in terms of how closely they had worked with issues related to multiculturalism. For some, working with multicultural issues was an important part of their everyday professional duties but for others it was just one issue amongst many others. There was also variation amongst the experts in terms of how closely they had worked to the grassroots level of VET institutes. Some experts focused primarily on legislation and policy-

making meaning that in their everyday work they rarely had a chance to visit vocational institutes. Two participants, however, were principals of VET institutes, meaning they were closer to the everyday reality of staff and students while also keeping an eye on educational policy on a national level. Table 1 represents the anonymized code of the responder, professional position of the participant, duration of interview and length of transcribed text.

Table 1: Participants of the study

Anonymized code of the responder	Professional position	Duration of the interview	Number of pages of transcript
H1	Lobbyist	1:01:56	10
H2	Principal	1:22:48	18
H3	Official	1:12:35	16
H4	Official	1:29:10	17
H5	Official	1:11:57	17
H6	Lobbyist	1:18:38	15
H7	Principal	1:30:24	19
H8	Official	1:27:00	18
H9	Official	1:19:16	18
H10	Lobbyist	1:37:46	22
H11	Official	1:01:08	14

The interviews lasted on average approximately 75 minutes, with the longest being 1 hour and 37 minutes and the shortest just over an hour. In order to familiarize myself with the data, I transcribed all of the interviews word for word. The data was also anonymized and the participants' interviews were marked with clear codes. The transcribed interview material added up to total of 184 pages of text data in Cambria-font, font-size 12 and line space 1.

The interviews were carried out in Finnish. Most of the interviews were conducted at participants' workplaces during working hours but a few were done in cafés. Almost all of the interviews were conducted in Helsinki but a few took place in other cities in Finland. The

interviews began with a brief overview of the subject after which participants were offered a chance to ask any questions. A few participants wanted to know more about the precise subject of the interview and the background and focus were explained to them.

Each interview began with a simple word association warm-up exercise followed by a series of questions. The warm-up exercise and interview framework (Appendix 2) were modeled after Andreouli and colleagues' (2016) focus group topic guide, which first invites individuals to reflect individually on their general views of racism and then shifts to asking questions about local community and school context. I modified this framework to better suit the context of this study and the individual interviews. The idea of the warm-up exercise was the same as for Andreouli and colleagues – to prime the participants to gather their thoughts and come up with different perspectives. The participants were told that they have three minutes time to write down onto a blank piece of paper keywords and sentences that come to mind when thinking about "multiculturalism in the context of vocational education". After the three minutes was finished, they were asked to go through the list and select the words and sentences that they felt were the most important. The researcher collected the word association exercises at the end of each interview before which they were at the participant's disposal. In several interviews participants used the word association exercise papers later on to illustrate and visualize their ideas. The key words and sentences that the participants wrote down functioned as a kind of mental blueprint for the ensuing conversation. Aside from the warm-up exercise, the only other stimuli were the interview questions.

The interview framework was divided into three different sections: 1) myself and others, 2) expert's organizational perspective and 3) multiculturalism in vocational education on a general level. The purpose of the first section was to invite participants to reflect on how they understand their own role and position in regards to multiculturalism. In the second section they were asked to reflect on how these positions fitted in with the organizational perspectives of their employers and other organizations. In the final section respondents were asked about multiculturalism in the context of Finnish VET on a general level. The questions were open-ended to allow for flexibility and a wide-range of topics.

The semi-structured nature of the interview meant that there was a loose general structure (including sub-questions in each theme or section) that I tried to follow in all of the interviews. During the interviews I tried to pick out specific questions from the framework that would fit the rhythm of the interview and topic that the participant was discussing. If the participants emphasized or kept coming back to a certain point of view or idea then I would ask follow-up questions related to this. In order to uncover the metarepresentational level of the participants' social representations, they were asked to reflect on what they thought relevant others might be thinking about these questions and how they in turn feel about this.

The word association warm-up worked well in getting the conversation started. After the first few interviews, I realized how important it was to keep coming back to the topic of multiculturalism throughout the interview because it easily faded into the background. Especially with some of the more policy-oriented participants, multiculturalism often served as a kind of backdrop against which larger systemic issues such as the VET reform were framed. It was important to keep discretely reminding participants of the focus of the study by asking how what they were explaining was related to multiculturalism.

Approximately half of the data set revolved around educational policy in VET and the current reform process. The other half was related to different dimensions of multiculturalism. Naturally, these two are mutually interdependent and weave their way through the interviews. In some of the interviews the discussion went very deep into the legislation and politico-ideological foundations of the new reform and its implications for VET. Sometimes the interviews would be dominated by technical perspectives on the new legislation, for example about the way that the new system of funding works affects students with a migrant background and whether or not this is fair. Other times moral, political or philosophical perspectives on the history and development of VET were brought up. All in all it could be said that the range and depth of the collected data proved robust enough to shed light on how the experts understood multiculturalism in the context of VET from multiple points of view.

5.2 Methods of thematic content analysis

The method of thematic analysis was applied to the collected interview data. Qualitative content analysis is commonly used in studying verbal data that describes content of spoken and written language (Braun & Clarke 2006; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In qualitative content analysis, the data is examined from the perspective of text, since most data can be reconstructed into a written form such as transcribed interviews. Qualitative content analysis aims to provide a systematic and comprehensive description of the meanings and contents of the collected data (Braun & Clarke 2006; Chi 1997; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This study utilizes the thematic approach for analyzing the contents of interview data.

Qualitative content analysis aims at identifying the various contents or meanings related to the studied phenomenon through different kinds of content classification (Chi, 1997). In this study, content refers to the main themes and subjects that emerge from data. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005) qualitative content analysis is not a single method and is based on different methods for developing coding categories. They distinguished three different kinds of approaches: conventional, directed, or summative (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In the conventional approach researchers rely on inductive category development i.e., the categories and names for categories emerge directly from the data. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), in the directed approach the existing theory or theories provide guidance for developing initial codes. Similarly, Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2009) distinguish three kinds of methods for creating classification categories: theory driven, data-driven analysis and a combination of theory and data driven analysis. In data-driven analysis such as the one used in thus study the classification structure is derived directly from the data.

First, the interviews were transcribed word for word and each interview formed one data corpus. Once all the interviews were transcribed, the development of content categories began. In the present study, the thematic analysis produced descriptive information about the content of the data. The classification categories in the thematic analysis were derived directly from the data, not from theory. This preliminary descriptive data is supplemented by a deeper analysis of possible social representations by identifying objectifications and anchors, two of

the central methodological and theoretical concepts from SRT. Thus, the data analysis was conducted in two interrelated phases: first the preliminary descriptive thematic analysis to understand and then afterwards the analysis of social representations building on the thematic analysis. Classifications were based on comparison and juxtapositions between categories. The data analysis process was systematic in nature and it covered the entire data set.

The analysis of qualitative data is not generally seen as the last stage of a research process, instead the research is considered to be a cyclical process, in which the data analysis already begins during the data gathering and with familiarizing oneself with the data. In order to get a good overall picture of the data, I started my analysis by reading through the whole data set several times. First I read through each interview making notes things that I noticed. I tried organizing and arranging the data in different ways until I finally decided it was necessary to drive the material into ATLAS.ti, a computer-aided content analysis program, for the actual data coding. It was much easier to develop and iterate the classification categories with the use of ATLAS.ti. Each time I read through the data, my understanding of the themes and the links between them became clearer. The classification categories functioned as flexible tools for outlining my data. New analytic categories were created across iterative cycles of analysis.

The data was segmented according to the unit of analysis (Chi, 1997). The unit of analysis in this study was each idea that could be individually discerned. For the most part each individually discernible idea was expressed in a group of 1-5 sentences focusing on one main point, which determined the category under which the idea was classified. The transcribed interview text was arranged into a logical system based on the unit of analysis and segmentation, e.g. into a form of numbered rows, which takes place automatically in ATLAS.ti. Writing short memos and summaries of the interviews helped me keep in mind the context of the interview during coding.

Based on the memos and notes made during transcription of the data and frequent readings of the entire data set, I came up with the idea of dividing the material into three different modes of talk*: local, intergroup and systemic*. These refer to the different perspectives from which the interview subjects discussed multiculturalism. The *local mode of talk* was based on the everyday reality of vocational institutes i.e. on the grassroots level of students, staff and

management and local practices and realities. The *intergroup mode of talk* focused on social relations between people from different ethnic groups and socioeconomic situations, for example socially disadvantaged Finns and migrants. The *systemic mode of talk* was the most frequent and involved more abstract and general questions about society, culture, policy-making, ethics and so forth.

Each unit of data was assigned to one of the three modes of talk. Once all of the data had been categorized, I began organizing the data into more detailed subcategories, which will be presented in detail in the results. I started with approximately 480 different units of data in 96 distinct subcategories. In the second phase I narrowed it down to 33 subcategories. Finally, because I wanted the *local*, *intergroup* and *systemic* modes of talk to focus on multiculturalism, I selected 9 subcategories that were most relevant for the research questions in this thesis. Appendix 3 represents all thematic categories developed during thematic analysis with ATLAS.ti. It shows all subcategories in each mode of talk, including two extra categories labeled 'Reform' and 'Migrant education' that were excluded from the final analysis. The categories selected for deeper analysis are marked in bold font.

6. RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the study. The first section is a preliminary descriptive thematic analysis of how multiculturalism appeared in the context of vocational education and training in the VET experts' speech. The thematic analysis divides the experts' speech into three modes of talk: local, inter-group and systemic, each of which is presented in detail. In the second and third sections the VET experts' social representations of multiculturalism are examined with particular focus on the anchors and objectifications that the VET experts employed. The fourth and final section focuses on the meta-representations of multiculturalism that can be discerned in the VET experts' speech.

6.1 Multiculturalism in the context of vocational education and training in the VET experts' speech

On a general level, the VET experts discussed the complicated and multifaceted question of multiculturalism through the framework of migration and migrant education. Multiculturalism and migrants/migrant education were spoken about more or less interchangeably. None of the respondents spoke at length about immigration policy or multiculturalism in an abstract or academic sense assumedly because they were not experts in these subjects. Several of the interviews began with respondents stating outright that they are not experts in multicultural issues or migration policy but they know the education system and policy-making. Multiculturalism was seen as a larger, crosscutting theme in the Finnish education system. For the experts, VET in general and migrant education in particular provided the contextual basis for making sense of multiculturalism. It is only natural that the VET experts would use the system that is already familiar to them as the starting point for making sense of a multifaceted social object such as multiculturalism.

The experts made multiculturalism intelligible by breaking it down into smaller, more easily managed pieces. These different ways of approaching multiculturalism in the context of VET have been labeled *local*, *intergroup* and *systemic*. Next I will present each distinct mode of talk in detail. It is important to note that often times the different modes of talk appeared next to each other in the experts' speech, making clear-cut categorizations difficult. Nonetheless, the basic framework that has been adopted gives a kind of general blueprint to the thematic analysis that made further examination of social representations possible.

6.2.1 Local mode of talk

The local mode of talk consists of two categories: *personalization* and *diversity*. Personalization referred to how personalized learning pathways were being constructed in VET institutes on a local level. Diversity referred to how questions of cultural difference were

managed and controlled within vocational institutes. The local mode of talk emphasized local institutional practices and social relations in regards to multiculturalism between students, staff and local administration. It mostly consisted of speech from participants with the closest connections and experience with multiculturalism on the grassroots level of vocational education. Therefore, it is only natural that the two principals that were interviewed spoke especially frequently in a local mode. Several of the other participants also spoke from a local perspective because they often had prior experience working within VET institutes, but the two principals stood out in terms of the depth of their responses. Hence, the frequency of data coded into this category appears to reflect the professional positions of the experts that I interviewed. It is likely that had I interviewed more experts from a grassroots level, this particular category would have been significantly larger.

Both *personalization* and *diversity* categories revolved around the everyday reality of multiculturalism in vocational institutes. The local autonomy of VET providers was increased in the new legislation, meaning that managing multiculturalism became a local issue. Oftentimes respondents would first discuss migrant educational policy on a national level as a kind of background and then explain how it was being implemented locally.

Personalization is at the very center of the new VET reform. In the local mode of talk, both of the principals brought it up but in slightly different contexts. In both instances there was a focus on the need for staff and management to learn new ways of organizing education within the context of VET institutes. Personalization requires a profound change in both attitude and skills amongst local administration and staff. From the perspective of multiculturalism, personalization means allowing for differences and accepting that not everyone is going to automatically receive the same single-size package anymore but, instead, students receive guidance and support according to their individual needs. This paradigm-shift in the logic of organizing education is succinctly summed up in the following two excerpts:

> H2: "*Somehow it's like a part of this old-fashioned school life that we train students to attend from eight to four and within that schedule to do the assignments that the teacher says. Otherwise you don't pass this sort of "school test". So I see that prayer moments and other things that have maybe been part of multiculturalism will be like*

"hey can we give someone… special permission to do something differently?" So somehow I feel that now that the reform is coming and everyone is supposed have their own path and their own support and their own opportunities then this will be the question with other things as well, not just in multiculturalism."

H7: *"(...) now that we're hopefully doing the personalization much better than before, do we know how? Are we able to catch prior know-how from the backgrounds of foreign-language speakers that we can recognize? That's something for staff and teachers and guidance counselors to learn in order to have sufficient specs to recognize the know-how."*

In the first excerpt personalization is directly concretized in prayer moments, which are used as an example of how students' different needs have historically been taken into consideration in the institutional culture of VET. Now these and other exceptions are being extended to all students through personalization. Multiculturalism is positioned as one step towards the larger objective of developing VET to become better attuned to all individual differences between students. In the second excerpt, the participant understands multiculturalism in terms of improving how individual differences are taken into account through personalization. Both participants recognize that from an organizational perspective this means developing new attitudes, practices and updating staffs' capacities.

Identifying relevant skills and working experience in foreign-language speakers' backgrounds is critical for personalization. Even though personalization does not discern between Finnish/Swedish-language speakers and foreign-language speakers, the above excerpts indicate that there are institutional and organizational challenges that make creating personalized learning pathways for foreign-language speakers more challenging in practice. Providing new training for teachers' and guidance counselors is not enough, also attitudes amongst staff need to be critically examined. Because the success of the VET reform depends on the rigorous and consistent implementation of the new legislation, on the local level VET administrators recognize that there is an extra challenge when it comes to foreign-language speakers. Multiculturalism is concretized in the form of assessments of prior skills and different individual learning pathways and individual allowances. At the same time this

means that on an organizational level there is less focus on group identity in favor of individually personalized needs.

Diversity came up frequently in the local mode of talk. One of its distinguishing features was how on a local level diversity was seen as an ordinary part of life in VET institutes and not a separate issue.

> H7: *"It's an integral part of vocational education. And just like we talk about internationality being a part of our ordinary lives here without it being separated, so we have students from different backgrounds whether they belong to the original population or come from migrant backgrounds."*

The principal makes it clear that cultural diversity in the student populations is a normal part of everyday reality in VET institutes. Students from migrant backgrounds are examples of one kind of diversity but there are many other kinds of differences between students' backgrounds as well. Managing these differences through personalization is a normal part of VET and this is part of how multiculturalism fits into the bigger picture of VET. Conversely, the more students stand out in terms of cultural diversity, the more they need to be fitted into the universal personalization practices in vocational institutes. The participant appears to make multiculturalism within VET institutes into a non-issue or at least no more important than any other form of diversity. At the same time, however, multiculturalism has its own challenges that need to be taken into consideration in the administration of VET:

> I: *"How does culture show up in your work? What kind of a role does it have in the everyday reality of this institute?"*

> H2: *"Well, as dull as it, when you're the principal you have to make the guidelines. So from a cultural perspective this is related to questions like "should we make a rule against covering your face?" You start to think, "Hey, is this really equality? Are we making rules just so someone isn't allowed to be different? Is this really a security issue or what is this?" (...) So it's like you have to think about it and if you decide to*

ban something and it has absolutely no effect on students from a Finnish background then you have to make sure that it's well-founded."

This extract provides an interesting contrast to the previous one. When it comes to cultural rules and preferences, "difference" is understood in terms of potential discrimination. The principal must juggle between respecting different cultural norms and making rules vocational institutes. It is vital that all students are treated fairly regardless of their cultural practices and that the institute's rule and policies are consistent, reasonable and non-discriminatory. At the same time, however, there is a distinct separation between Finnish and non-Finnish cultural backgrounds. The principal is positioned as rule-maker and arbiter of contentious cultural issues, which do not affect all students in the same way. Managing and controlling cultural diversity is a complicated dialogical process in which the interests and feelings of different groups must be weighed against institutional and moral principles.

To summarize, the local mode of talk was composed of VET experts' observations regarding the role of multiculturalism in the everyday administrative level of vocational institutes. Multiculturalism is simultaneously local as well as systemic because developments on a national or international level eventually trickle down to the grassroots, precipitating different kinds of challenges and opportunities for local administration to take into their own hands.

6.2.2 Intergroup mode of talk

Intergroup relations were something that all of the participants brought up in the interviews. All of the experts that I interviewed expressed hope for harmonious and constructive social relations between different ethnic and cultural groups in Finnish society. This hope was connected to a fear of increasing hostility and resentment, both in contemporary Finnish political discourse as well as in the social relations between different groups within VET institutes. Intergroup relations came up in so many different forms that categorizing them proved challenging. I debated whether or not to include this category independently or to integrate the data into the local and systemic categories. Ultimately, I decided that the

intergroup perspective was important enough on its own because respondents often brought it up in the interviews in a more nuanced and personal way compared to, for example, the systemic mode of talk which tended to be more technical and empirical.

The intergroup perspective consisted of three subcategories: *mutual understanding*, *racism* and *competition*. *Mutual understanding* included various perspectives on the differences between students', teachers' and the interviewed participants' personal backgrounds and the challenges as well as benefits that these differences entail. Participants stressed the importance of building mutual understanding to improve intergroup relations. The *racism* category consisted of participants' reflections on prejudice and antagonism - where these originated and the role they play in VET. I decided to include *competition* as a separate subcategory, even though it basically consisted of participants explaining the reasons and consequences of *racism*. This was composed of participants' talk about the economic tensions between different social groups, mostly related to perceived or feared competition between Finns and non-Finns over workplaces.

Mutual understanding included a variety of perspectives, ranging from participants relaying personal anecdotes about learning about cultural differences to more abstract discussions about how people tend to understand and discuss multiculturalism in the context of vocational education. One of the most important ideas in this category, however, was the ideal of shared humanity playing a critical role in well-functioning intergroup relations. Shared humanity can only be discovered through the process of building mutual understanding, and it is one of the responsibilities of VET to provide the framework for this to happen:

> I: "*What kinds of hopes or goals do you have in relation to multiculturalism in vocational education?"*
>
> H6: "*Well probably that we would know how to look at it as an asset. And know how to use it as a learning experience. And honestly, I don't know if we should talk about multiculturalism or rather about different people because there is a lot more difference there than just cultural backgrounds. So actually the best way, the goal is*

that we wouldn't even have to talk about any multiculturalism but about different people who share their experiences (...) so that is what would be valuable and educating, to have this kind of dialogue between different people."

The question of how to facilitate understanding between students from different backgrounds appears in many of the interviews. In the above excerpt, multiculturalism is characterized as an asset and potential learning experience so long as it is facilitated through dialogue based on individual differences as opposed to over-generalizing cultural differences. The best way of promoting cultural diversity is by focusing on individual rather than collective experience or group identity. The goal appears to be to make multiculturalism unnecessary as a topic of discussion and replace it with individual-focused discussion. This in turn reflects the general trend in VET to emphasize the importance of the individual. There were also other ways of looking at mutual understanding:

H8: "*... we've gone in the wrong direction when you consider that now we're defending one particular "right way to exist" but I think as a whole people are looking for something like an increase in knowledge and new alternatives and perspectives to live fuller and better lives. And all these kinds of different things interest at least some people. On the other hand, polarization is also doing its best to divide us here."*

H1: "*Multiculturalism isn't such an obviously positive thing in the VET institutes, amongst students, but instead it produces tensions and questions that we don't necessarily have the tools to resolve. Up here we talk a lot and try to justify multiculturalism by kind of... side-stepping the tensions that it produces in everyday life in institutes and in the classroom (...) the people on the upper-level, the system architects and related experts, they don't deal with people's everyday lives and the worries and anxieties that they have."*

There is no unified vision amongst the experts of how to facilitate mutual understanding in the context of VET. As we have seen, there is disagreement about the goal as well as about

the means. The first extract refers to the existence of one particular "right way to exist", which can be interpreted as a reference to an ethno-nationalist orientation. Multiculturalism is based on the acceptance of multiple ways of existing where different groups of people learn from each other and improve their lives in the process. All the extracts concede that not everyone is interested in increasing their knowledge about other cultures or believe that multiculturalism can contribute to people living fuller and better lives. Polarization is explicitly mentioned as a detrimental social and political phenomenon that is dividing people. Multiculturalism is juxtaposed with monoculturalism and ethno-nationalism.

There is also recognition that the ideal of shared humanity has not been successfully brought into practice in the everyday reality of VET institutes. Decision-makers or those "in the bubble" are accused of having an unrealistic picture of the situation. So-called "system architects" and "related experts" have failed to understand and address ordinary people's worries on the grassroots level of VET. Multiculturalism is not uniformly positive; it also has negative elements which have been ignored by system architects who use multiculturalism as a talking point, an overly optimistic dream or, even worse, empty rhetoric divorced from the reality of the classroom and vocational institute. All three excerpts highlight the gap in understanding that exists between the expert and the grassroots level when it comes to the lived reality of multiculturalism. There is an air of self-criticism in the extracts, as though the experts recognize that the previous systemic orientation to multiculturalism has failed.

Racism was mentioned in connection with multiculturalism in practically all of the interviews. It was difficult to classify into a single category because it came up in so many different contexts. In the intergroup mode of talk, racism revolved around the following themes: 1) racist attitudes in working life and the relationship to vocational education, 2) racist and discriminatory language and attitudes amongst teachers and staff, 3) racism as part of family value systems.

> H2: *"If you go outside the bubble and think about how much ugly stuff people are writing on the net and elsewhere… it makes sense that in quite a few places where they employ people who have graduated from vocational institutes then there might be even more of this kind of talk. Racist talk and attitudes and stuff. And then they get*

their training here so that's a big mission for teachers and employers and everybody to create this type of tolerant work community together."

H6: "*If there's a teacher who is a certain age that uses this kind of language without really meaning anything by it and then you've got young people there and for them the meaning of the words is totally different and they have racist and discriminatory meanings. Then that leads to the teacher creating this kind of atmosphere. So, in fact, it's language and cultural differences and the background, the generation you belong to, that maybe also creates these kinds of racist things as well.*"

Both extracts paint quite a negative picture of the reality of racism in vocational education and working life but in quite different ways. In the first extract the principal describes the relationship between racist attitudes amongst people in working life who have VET qualifications and the role of staff in VET institutes whose mission it is to help foster understanding and combat racism. Workers with vocational qualifications are portrayed as less tolerant and open to cultural diversity than people with more education. It is implied that socioeconomic factors and educational background affect people's orientation towards cultural diversity. The principal connects racist attitudes in working life to the level of education that students receive in vocational education. There is a relationship between students graduating with vocational qualifications and moving into working life with racist attitudes, implying that some people in working life do not have enough education to orientate positively to multiculturalism. The principal suggests that it is the duty of those working in VET to transform racist attitudes in working life together with the help of employers.

In the second extract, racism is framed as a question of intergenerational cultural interpretation rather than abuse of authority. It is the change in times that is creating racism. Teachers' racist language is a reflection of how standards for language-use and behavior have changed. Teachers are not racist but misunderstood. The respondent takes a benevolent approach towards teachers "who do not really mean anything by it" when they use racist language, implying that because they are from an older generation, they are less responsible for their actions and speech. Individual and cultural diversity is expanded to include intergenerational differences. The mission of VET institutes to facilitate mutual understanding

and combat racism is less clear if the racism is coming from inside of them rather than from problematic attitudes in working life.

> H8: *"I don't believe that our teachers, that anyone is an open racist or something like that but, well, you know, you don't have to say anything to someone's face, it just sort of lingers there somewhere. You turn your head away when something happens. And just that feeling that "I'm not accepted", even if you're told "do this and this", but if it reeks of this sort of… we're quite good at this as humans."*

> H9:*"These young girls started to act racist towards a student and I heard about it from a teacher who had intervened and done so in a very exemplary manner. But we talked about where it came from. It comes very strongly from the family's value system. The parents' value system. These kinds of young people just out of comprehensive school, their minds have definitely not developed on their own accord that strongly yet so there are always quite a few other inducements. And therefore it matters, for example, what the family thinks about it."*

The picture that these respondents paint of racism is darker and more sinister. Openly espousing racist views can lead to losing your job but one does not have to openly espouse a racist view in order to perpetuate racism. Nor is it merely a difference in cultural or intergenerational norms. The first extract demonstrates how racist attitudes can be subtly conveyed in the context of student-teacher interaction. In this case, racist attitudes are far more difficult to confront and contest than in the previous example. The reference to "as humans" at the end of the excerpt is important because the respondent appears to be commenting on the existence of a universal human predisposition towards intergroup animosity. As humans, we can use our social ingenuity to devise ways of hurting people we don't like and do it in such a manner that we cannot easily be held accountable for it. Multiculturalism means dealing with the challenge of our universal human capacity for abuse and mistreatment. Ironically, part of our mutual understanding as humans is based on this shared capacity for cruelty.

According to the second expert, family background and upbringing also play a significant role in racist attitudes amongst students. Racism is explained in terms of different family value systems. A family with a racist value system constitutes a kind of micro-culture that strongly influences how their children orientate to cultural diversity. The responsibility of the youths in this example is minimized on the grounds that their minds are still developing and their families determine this trajectory of development. In the same way that the teacher who uses racist language is absolved by virtue of intergenerational differences, the youths in this example are absolved because of inter-familial differences. Racism is explained in structural terms in both cases. However, this explanation ignores the fact that there are also young people from racist families who have disowned these views, just as there are teachers from older generations who do not use racist language. The role of the individual in terms of agency, autonomy and responsibility is pushed into the background and as a result, the heterogeneity of potential ways of orientating towards cultural diversity is also minimized.

Competition for workplaces and social standing is one of the major factors behind racism. Minority/majority relations are marked by struggle over resources. This economic dimension to multiculturalism is emphasized in the context of VET because it is located at the nexus between the education and working life. The experts use competition as a kind of macro-level sociological explanation for lower and working class Finns' racist attitudes:

> H1: *"If our emancipatory apparatus and our welfare-state apparatus, which is actually the prerequisite for the emancipatory apparatus to function, if this is disturbed and our economic growth stagnates and we start dishing out scarcity again then of course people have the tendency to become wolves when their own income and concern for their own future is great. So the risk is that this sort of development where we feel a need to divide ourselves into good and bad will be strengthened. "*

> H11: *"If we think of Finland as a nation and what people think about immigration… in growing urban centers it's seen as important that we need workers and people and taxpayers. But then if your own situation is sort of… maybe there's a competitive situation of "who gets the job?" then this sort of divisiveness could probably emerge,*

like "should we think of native Finns or new Finns or what?" It's not something that we can solve in the short-term, we need time for these changes."

In order for multiculturalism to succeed, economic growth is needed because scarcity leads to a struggle for resources. In a democratic society this can lead to a shift in power whereby the institutions of government are used not to emancipate but to dominate and this has strong implications for how multiculturalism will be managed. Multiculturalism is framed here in terms of political and institutional power. When this power shifts, for example as a result of economic downturn, multicultural policy shifts with it. The moral ground for social solidarity begins to shrink and fragment, resulting in intergroup conflict. Multiculturalism is characterized as part of a larger political project aiming at human emancipation.

The second extract proposes that people's orientation towards multiculturalism depends in part on their particular personal situation, for example where they live. Different ways of thinking about immigration are associated with geographical location, for example people in growing urban centers are stereotyped as more willing to see the necessity of immigration than in rural areas. Competition over "who gets the job" may fuel social divisions between "native Finns" and "new Finns", which can lead to discriminatory social hierarchies based on ethno-cultural prioritization. The acceptance of cultural diversity in Finland is taking place gradually and will continue to do so as long as economic difficulties do not negatively impact intergroup relations. The definition of who can be Finnish depends on the economic situation: cultural differences may either be emphasized or they can become more flexible over time to encompass new ways of becoming and being Finnish.

The intergroup mode of talk focused on discussing multiculturalism in terms of social relations between minorities and majority. Some of the experts saw VET as a crucible for social change. At the same time, the complicated reality of intercultural exchange was also addressed. VET and working life are critical locations for building positive intergroup relations. There was a consensus on how important it is to address racism but a general acknowledgement that not enough has been done so far and more measures are needed to ensure continued social stability and safety. Growing economic inequality a primary concern and something that is difficult to affect since it is dependent on global financial markets.

6.2.3 Systemic mode of talk

Most of the VET experts' speech was classified as belonging to the systemic mode of talk. The prevalence of the systemic mode of talk is most likely due to experts' professional profiles. The VET reform and the changes it has brought provided a logical starting point from which to discuss multiculturalism in the context of VET. The systemic mode of talk was composed of the following four categories: *civic engagement, social stability, employment & working life* and *segregation*. The *civic engagement* subcategory reflected some experts' argument that educational policy needs to focus more on issues of active and critical citizenship and participation in society. *Social stability* was about utilizing VET to help ensure a safe and equitable future in Finland. *Employment & working life* focused on what experts had to say about the connection between VET and the labor market. S*egregation* consisted of experts' concern about the direction in which Finnish society is now developing.

Civic engagement was a theme that several respondents emphasized. They argued that it is of vital importance to ensure that inside the framework of vocational education there is a chance for students and staff to discuss important societal issues such as globalization, immigration and multiculturalism. They expressed worry about the spread of anti-immigration sentiments and the prevalence of negative attitudes towards cultural diversity amongst students and members of staff in VET institutes. They warned that entities hostile to multiculturalism could try to fill a "vacuum" in the institutional culture and that the difficult circumstances caused by budget cuts and legislative upheaval in VET could pose a threat to social stability if left unchecked. Discussing multiculturalism in the context of VET is difficult because vocational institutes generally lack an institutional culture that would encourage civic engagement and discussion. In VET, the emphasis on working life and the development of practical skills at the work place means that there is very little room or incentive to discuss any social issues.

> H4: *"With the reform the responsibility shifts more to the workplaces and it differentiates the shared picture about the direction in which citizens are growing. Because, of course, there are - individuality is a good thing - but I'd say that individual paths are currently being overemphasized everywhere. There are certain things that need to exist in society; common rules, samspel. And it must be explained*

what they mean. It's also related to multiculturalism, that we examine these things in a community. And they should have a place in the, should I say in the school timetable. So it's not something vague that you're told in the corner of the work hall, how we will be cooperating."

H10: *"The people that go to VET directly after basic education in Finland… according to studies their parents have a somewhat lower level of education and this is related to - I think it's related to them not always relating to multiculturalism in an easygoing way. So I'm personally of the opinion that it's us here in vocational institutes who will solve this question - this is the place where the question has to be answered: how do we create dialogue here in Finland and where does this racism come from? If we are incapable of solving this during vocational education then it will escalate."*

The first extract argues that the over-emphasis on individualization in VET has undermined students' civic engagement. VET needs a more holistic educational agenda that properly addresses society and citizenship. Multiculturalism is used as an example of a social issue that should be addressed in the context of vocational education in order to foster a sense of community, belonging and civic engagement. The expert refers to the "common rules" that bind people together in a community and serve as the basis for cooperation between citizens. Focusing on building individualized pathways means that there is less time and resources to build a sense of community. Around half of the participants worried that increasing focus on working life could lead to a "narrowing" of VET, whereby VET students' ability and motivation to participate as active and critical citizens in society is negatively impacted.

The second extract echoes the first in that VET staff and those working with VET in general, which also includes the people at the top, i.e. the experts themselves, have a social responsibility to ensure that positive encounters and dialogue can take place. Because certain segments of the population have difficulty in adjusting to the new multicultural reality of Finnish society, it is the duty of those working in the field of VET to "correct" racism and prejudice that come from students' families' lower level of education. VET as a whole is responsible for stopping racism from spreading and escalating. Facilitating discussion

amongst students and staff is instrumental in preventing the spread of racism, and this needs to be supported on many different levels of the VET system, from the grassroots to policy-making. Racist attitudes can be transformed while students are still studying but after they finish their studies this is more difficult as they transition into working life and the labor market where it is more difficult for the state to actively monitor or intervene.

Social stability was brought up by about half of the respondents. Although instability in the form of radicalization, for example, was not seen as an immediate threat, there was concern that the situation could worsen over time. Multiculturalism needs to be supported by effective public policy. Changes in the social, political and cultural environment of VET need to be taken into consideration in policy-making. The values enshrined in the Finnish constitution are the foundation of policy-making, because this is where the ultimate mandate for moral and political power resides. In the extracts below both experts identify threats to social stability:

> H4: "… *we've got this radical right wing and then there are certain minority groups and the interaction taking place between them and the information that is feeding this that comes from somewhere. So this is what society should be fighting against. I mean organized and legal society."*

> H5: *"… it's pretty much a question of social stability at some point. Also for native Finns… in the sense that if we have mass-scale immigrant unemployment and social benefits then those are good places for racism to grow. I think for migrants it's a bigger question than just education and it needs to be solved somehow pretty quickly."*

In both extracts vocational education is framed as a kind of battleground for an existential struggle for power between organized and legal society and the forces hostile to it. Some of the forces are domestic and some are foreign in origin. The first respondent identifies groups and ideologies that are actively challenging the authority of organized and legal society and calls for them to be resisted. The expert mentions the radical right wing specifically but not which minority groups are also involved in this interaction and what their role is, whether they are for example victims of racism or if they pose their own threat. There is an allusion to

external influence fueling friction between these groups by feeding information, possibly a reference to Russia, which has been accused of funding right wing extremists and populist groups in Europe.

The second extract focuses on internal pressures in Finland, framing the threat in terms of migrants having high unemployment rate and being dependent on social benefits, which is creating the conditions for racism to grow amongst "native Finns". Helping migrants enter the labor market and become economically productive members of society is critical for social stability. Multiculturalism is portrayed in this way as a dialectical process of struggle, where impersonal macro-social economic forces are the source of tension between minority and majority group relations. From such an institutional perspective, multiculturalism is about maintaining social stability by managing the tensions between different groups in society.

Employment & labor market were two particularly important themes in the data. All the experts' emphasized the interconnectedness of vocational education and working life. Multiculturalism was often concretized in the figure of the migrant that needs to be integrated into the labor market through vocational education. The challenge for VET is to provide opportunities for migrants to improve their language and other basic skills necessary for working life and thus find their way forward in society. The excerpts below capture the connection between vocational education and the multiculturalization of Finnish working life:

> H1: *"Vocational education has been accepted as an operator that can give people from a migrant background the chance to be employed in the Finnish labor market. And we've especially also accepted the multiculturalization of certain sectors of work. And… having accepted this then it has become a natural part, maybe especially at the top level, of the profile of vocational education."*

> H2: *"As a society, we can't afford to leave migrants - foreigner-language speakers are maybe a bit different as a group - but those who have entered the country, we need to get them employed and educated fast and in this way to integrate them and in my opinion that is our social responsibility in VET. In working life we already have an*

employment mismatch and a labor shortage and people say, "We won't make it unless we get more non-Finns or more labor from abroad"."

It is interesting how the notion of "acceptance" in the first excerpt is repeated several times. The first time the respondent speaks of acceptance in passive way, not specifying who exactly has accepted vocational education as an agent for integrating people from a migrant background into the Finnish labor market. The second time he specifies that "we" have accepted this. Finally he refers to the "top level", i.e. the higher levels of political and institutional decision-making in Finnish VET. It would appear that the respondent is referring to three different levels of acceptance: 1) a passive, nameless acceptance by unspecified persons whereby multiculturalization has slowly become a reality, 2) a general acceptance in Finnish society of certain sectors of work becoming heavily dependent on migrants and 3) an acceptance amongst top-level national decision-makers that VET is and should be the main pathway for migrants to integrate into the labor market. The multiculturalization of VET is framed as both a social responsibility to help migrants enter Finnish society as well as an economic necessity because there is a shortage of workers in numerous fields.

This combination of economic necessity and social responsibility is echoed in the second extract. One of the main objectives of the VET reform was to make vocational qualifications more relevant to the demands of working life. VET is especially important for adult migrants who are usually eager to find employment and begin earning a living but find the highly organized and regulated Finnish labor market difficult to enter. For someone without a qualification and with weak Finnish language skills, finding work that pays a decent wage is very difficult. The respondent uses economic terms such as "employment mismatch" and "labor shortage" which are commonly used in the public discourse on the unemployment problem in Finland. Multiculturalism is understood here in terms of migrant workforce that can provide a solution to the economic problems in Finland. The second extract includes a sense of urgency in regards to making sure the newly arrived migrants find work and begin contributing to the economy through taxes. Because unemployment rates amongst those migrant groups that have come to Finland on the basis of humanitarian migration are very high, focusing on providing quick labor market access to newcomers is justified in order to prevent the problem from compounding.

Throughout the interviews, numerous participants expressed worry at the polarization of Finnish society and the increasingly segregated social realities of its citizens. Some feared that Finland is seeing the rise of a permanent underclass of low-paid migrant labor, who work low-skill jobs with little or no protection from employers. If these divisions continue to deepen, it is possible that a group of people trapped in a cycle of intergenerational deprivation may emerge:

> *H10: Of course my hope is that the future division of labor in our society wouldn't be even this… hierarchical. And of course my fear is that this won't be the case. And if it isn't the case then I think that VET providers have a big role to play and, for example, teacher education, to make sure that social mobility is possible and people find their place somehow. I mean it's not, I claim that if for example someone has difficulties with Finnish in elementary school, our teachers put him or her on a certain track in their minds. And that's why I think that our teacher education really has a big task cut out for them."*

Respondents discussed multiculturalism in terms of institutional structures in work and education, which can be used in different ways to either replicate or transform power relations in society. The education system can provide people with the resources and support necessary to elevate themselves, both as individuals and as a collective. The above respondent is worried that the division of labor in Finnish society will become increasingly hierarchical in the future, implying that something needs to be done to develop the education system so that this does not happen. However, the power of globalized market forces makes it difficult to create viable solutions. The respondents' answers imply an awareness that the educational system has been created by people and can be modified as needed. Multiculturalism requires develop attitudes and practices that provide equal opportunities to students from different backgrounds, in order to protect principles of equity and social mobility in Finnish society.

Segregation was a theme that concerned all of the participants. All of the participants were worried about the polarization of Finnish society and the concentration of education and wealth amongst the rich and upper-middle class. Segregation in education and working life were considered especially detrimental for the aspirations of migrants in VET, many of whom

come from very different social realities and may find it difficult to compete with Finns who have grown up and more or less automatically know how the system works:

> H3: *"Our system is built on this homogeneous group that can read and write and who all have a degree from comprehensive education and afterwards a degree from secondary education. So all our structures are based on everyone having basically the same readiness and pre-requisites."*

> H11: *"This is probably the difficult equation that if we get students inside who are not that proficient but they also need to get out, they need to get qualifications. So how are those qualifications, how are the skills going to correspond with what they want in working life? So that we don't get this kind of class-, a two-tiered labor market where there are these migrant construction workers and then the other workers, or whatever it may be."*

The respondents did not consider institutions neutral but recognized that they reflect societal norms that benefit certain groups and disadvantage others. Individual motivation and talent are important but from a multicultural perspective, reducing inequality is also about developing our institutions to better accommodate the success of all groups in society. The first extract describes how the Finnish education system has historically been developed for a homogeneous population, where everyone receives the same education. While the respondent exaggerates the degree of uniformity amongst the student body in this historical development, all of the respondents recognized that accommodating the increasing diversity of students' backgrounds is challenging from an institutional perspective. More diversity makes steering education less predictable because new contingencies need to constantly be taken into account. The fragmentation of uniformity in Finnish society can be seen in VET.

The second extract demonstrates that the multiculturalization of working life has been taking place at the same time as the Finland is transforming from an industrial economy to a service economy. The economic transformation and subsequent social changes affect people living in Finland in different ways. One easily visible change in the labor market is the

multiculturalization of certain sectors of work. Around a third of the respondents expressed fear that the changes in the economy could result in the creation of a permanent immigrant underclass. From the perspective of vocational education, this refers to the fact that students from a migrant background are systematically encouraged to fill the labor shortage in specific sectors. Students from a migrant background are disproportionately encouraged to study in certain fields in the hope that they would find it easier to integrate into the labor market:

> *H1: "It doesn't have to be like what I've understood, that all female migrants are recommended to go work in the social and healthcare sector. It might be justifiable from a labor market perspective but again it's… it's a little bit too strong ethnic-profiling when you consider that we're talking about individuals whose vocational dreams and hopes are just as valid as anyone else's."*

> H10: *"It takes quite a lot of guts and self-sufficiency to go apply for something totally different, to totally make your own choices. And of course we have these kinds of people and it's ok that we do but we may fail to recognize different talents because not everybody wants to be that special. And if you're a migrant, a foreign-language speaker, then you're often special anyway and the question is do you want to emphasize it or do you want to go along with those expectations? So if I've understood correctly and listened to the grassroots level then we've got quite, migrants' educational choices are pretty strongly directed by stereotypes. Some fields are allowed and some are not so allowed. And that's not a very individual-based choice anymore."*

Treating students from a migrant background in terms of their instrumental economic value instead of as individual human beings is one form of ethnic profiling. The respondents recognize that students from a migrant background are being pushed into particular sectors of work that are considered "suitable" for them. Both respondents juxtapose the dreams and hopes of individual migrants with the needs of Finnish society and assert that all students' aspirations should be considered equally valid. Multiculturalism should mean that everyone has an equal opportunity to purse their dreams and hence it is unfair to treat the choices of native Finns as more legitimate than migrants', even if this is done with good intentions.

Continuing on the same subject, the second respondent makes the point that it is not only external guidance but also self-imposed limitations that affect migrants' educational choices. Social stereotypes regarding "suitable" sectors of education and work become internalized. Internalization of stereotypes accelerates the segregation of certain fields of work through self-selection. At the end of the second extract, the respondent points out how this is antithetical to the ethos of individual choice because it is based on stereotypes and a sense of what is allowed. A wider spectrum of choice in educational pathway should be available even for those who do not want to be pioneers and stand out. On an individual level, such stereotypes can lead to a mismatch between what a person is interested in and what they decide to study (a major factor in dropping out) and on a societal level it means that we fail to match talent and potential with occupation and demand. This challenge of self-selection and social stratification can only be addressed through a combination of individual and structural responses. Improving the personalization process is an attempt to make educational pathways less dependent on perceived group membership and more tailored to an individual's desires.

The systemic mode of talk was the most frequent amongst the VET experts. Respondents discussed multiculturalism in terms of employment and working life and also emphasized how important it is to engage students to participate and understand their role in civil society. Social stability was a question that many of the VET experts brought up. The multiculturalization and individualization of education and working life are two interconnected phenomena, and VET is central to preparing both working life and students to meet these new challenges.

Generally speaking the experts made quite similar diagnoses about the everyday reality of multiculturalism in VET. They appeared to share a consensus about the necessity of improving Finnish education to better accommodate increasing cultural diversity. However, there were major disagreements between the experts in terms of how this should be achieved. It is also important to note that the experts might have given different answers if they had been interviewed as individual citizens – for the most part they approached multiculturalism from a markedly professional perspective. The thematic analysis provided a substantial and robust framework from which the interpretation of social presentations became possible.

6.2 Interpreting elements of social representations of multiculturalism in the VET experts' speech

In this section I will explain how I utilized the preliminary descriptive information as a framework for identifying social representations of multiculturalism. Social representations of multiculturalism definitely exist in the VET experts' speech. However, interpreting them is not a straightforward task. The preliminary descriptive information from the thematic content analysis functioned as the basis for uncovering potential social representations in the participants' speech. The VET experts socially represented multiculturalism as a novel, dynamic process that is transforming Finnish society and culture. They described the transformation that is taking place across multiple dimensions, ranging from productivity to community and citizenship. Especially important were the changing norms and practices in vocational institutes and working life. Multiculturalism was seen as one distinct part of a larger transformation that Finnish civil society is currently undergoing in which the relationships between individual, group and polity are being redefined. As a result, new understandings of what it means to be a member of Finnish society are emerging, not only in terms of national identity or diverse cultural or ethnic background but also in terms of civic participation.

At the center of the VET experts' social representation of multiculturalism is the complex, mutually interdependent relationship between individual and collective. Collective should be understood here in a broad sense because the experts referred to a wide range of potential social groupings, ranging from particular target groups in VET such as adult or migrant students, to VET students in general, all the way to Finnish and even global citizenry. Experts connected the multiculturalization of Finnish society with the individualization of VET.

Understanding the logic of the newly reformed VET system and its political and ideological underpinnings is critical for understanding why the experts' social represented multiculturalism in this way. Personalization is the center of the newly reformed VET system. Prioritizing the individual over the group means a profound shift in the way that VET is organized on all levels. This shift affects all students but is especially important for students

with a migrant background because effectively managing and improving migrant students' learning outcomes is a top educational priority. The role of the new legislation in the VET experts' social representation of multiculturalism cannot be ignored because it makes individual outcomes into the central measure of success while rendering group outcomes more or less inconsequential from a legislative perspective. This marks a major departure from the old way of managing education, where separate structures existed for different target groups. Although VET still recognizes the existence of different target groups, the new legislation is built around the individual. Students from a migrant background are treated in the same way as everyone else, that is to say that their individual needs are the top priority. At the same time migrant students in general, as a particular target group, have specific needs, which have been met through the creation of institutional structures and norms that educational policy-makers can steer and focus on when necessary. As a result of the individualization of VET, the ability to steer policy is reduced because all groups are under the same legislation based on individualization.

The VET experts' social representation of multiculturalism exists on the fault line between multiculturalization and individualization, taking its concretized form in the personalization process introduced by the VET reform. Personalization creates a dilemma for multiculturalism because it means prioritizing students' individual needs, even if these needs are a direct result of increasing cultural diversity, such as migrants' need for additional support in language learning. The relationship between the individual and the collective is being redefined in the new institutional norms set forth by the VET reform. Many of the experts expressed worry at the shift in power between individual and culture and the real-world consequences that this can cause.

The VET experts' social representation of multiculturalism also included an explicitly political dimension that came out when their speech was examined with a focus on metarepresentations. The experts followed the developments taking place in Finnish political culture closely and from a privileged vantage point. They worried about the deterioration and weakening of social and political order in Finland, which has historically been based on liberal-humanist values. They saw growing economic inequality as contributing to an increase in prejudice in Finnish society. In the context of VET and the Finnish education system, this

took the form of socioeconomic and cultural fragmentation and polarization amongst what used to be a relatively homogeneous student body. The profound changes in the social and political landscape of Finland are an integral part of multiculturalism. The experts spent a lot of time reflecting on the causes and consequences of these changes, especially in the political arena.

Explaining the growth and spread of right-wing populism and anti-immigration sentiment, both in the context of VET and in Finnish society in general, was a crucial part of the experts' social representation of multiculturalism. Despite differences when it came to educational policy, especially in regards to the VET reform, the major political dimension of the experts' social representation of multiculturalism can be seen in the way that they all positioned themselves as defenders of a social order based on liberal-humanist values. They expressed serious concern at the normalization of racism and the spread of anti-immigrant sentiment amongst VET students and working or lower class Finns. While the experts differed in terms of their personal and professional political orientations, and often made this explicit, they were all united in their commitment to support improved educational pathways and humane treatment for migrants and students with a migrant background and prevent racism from escalating and spreading. This solidarity and commitment to upholding liberal-humanist values such as equality in the face of racism can be seen as a major part of what tied the experts together as a "natural group".

6.3 VET experts' anchors and objectifications of multiculturalism

Common knowledge is organized and structured through the twin processes of anchoring and objectification, which form, maintain and change social representations (Marková, 2000). Both anchoring and objectification are crucial processes in the formation of social representations. In this section I examine how VET experts' social representations of multiculturalism are anchored and objectified. Anchors and objectifications are presented together in the table with examples from the interview material.

Table 2: Anchors and objectifications identified from VET experts' speech

Anchor	Objectification	Example
Difference	personalization	H2: "everyone is supposed have their own path and their own support and their own opportunities"
	-/-	H4: "individual paths are currently being overemphasized everywhere"
	prayer moment	H2: "prayer moments and other things that have maybe been part of multiculturalism"
	face veils	H2: "if, for example, one wanted that nobody is allowed to have their face covered"
Community	common rules	H4: "There are certain things that need to exist in society; common rules"
	citizen development	H4: "the direction in which citizens are growing"
	intercultural competence	H10: "diversity and dialogue training and kind of cultural familiarization"
	-/-	H11: "We've got sustainable development, which is something that everyone should understand (…) and it's sort of the same with people and cultures encountering."
Security	rule-Finland	H2: "we're a little bit like this rule-Finland"
	social stability	H5: "it's pretty much a question of social stability at some point"
	-/-	H4: "this is what society should be fighting against. I mean organized and legal society"
	political and religious radicalism	H4: "we've got this radical right wing and then there are certain minority groups"
	-/-	H10: If we are incapable of solving this during vocational education then it will escalate"
	wrongdoing	H11: "then we're in a situation where things can start to go wrong"
	-/-	H4: "the individual path shouldn't lead to the corner of the railway station for all that many"
Equality	birthright	H1: "forever determine the position and status of everyone else"
	ethnic profiling	H1: "it's a little bit too strong ethnic-profiling"
	model of success	H10: "the white girl with braided hair who reads lots of books is the one who succeeds out of our comprehensive school"
	low-skill migrant jobs	H11: "two-tiered labor market where there are these migrant construction workers"
	-/-	H8: "they're doubly second-class folks. They're in the cellar. If you're Somali and a taxi driver or something else"
Economic productivity	urban growth/rural stagnation	H11: "in growing urban centers it's seen as important"
	economic problems	H2: "In working life we already have an employment mismatch and a labor shortage"
	employed/unemployed	H5: "if we have mass-scale immigrant unemployment and social benefits"

It was natural to begin by identifying objectifications of multiculturalism in the VET experts' speech because these were easier to spot than examples of anchoring. I started by reading through the data and looking for symbols, images and other tropes that the VET experts used to concretize multiculturalism. Each participant naturally had his or her own way of speaking and some preferred imaginative and descriptive language from which it was easy to spot objectifications while others spoke in a more formal and neutral manner. The more formal

and technical the VET experts' language, the harder it was to locate objectifications. Certain respondents used lots of objectifications while some used only a few.

After going through the data and identifying the most relevant objectifications, I began organizing them into groups in order to make sense of how they were anchored. I tried to locate common themes in the experts' speech that would bring together the different objectifications that I found, relying on but not limiting myself to the preliminary information provided by the thematic analysis. Each anchor was formed to encompass a distinct aspect of how the VET experts made sense of multiculturalism.

Ultimately, after trying different ways of organizing and structuring the data, I concluded that multiculturalism was anchored in five main ways: *difference*, *community*, *security*, *equality* and *economic productivity*. These anchors were constructed to tie together the objectifications that I found, which captured important or iconic elements of multiculturalism in the VET experts' speech. Some of the anchors and objectifications come from extracts that appeared in the results of the thematic analysis; however, I also looked through the entire data for new particularly poignant examples.

Difference

Multiculturalism was anchored to *difference* because despite the fact that accommodating individual differences between students has been a natural part of VET for a long time, the rapid increase of students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds puts additional pressure on VET as a whole. Participants recognized that individuals, fields of study, regions and vocational education providers differed from one another. Accommodating for widespread differences is a prerequisite for an effective system of vocational education and training. 'Traditional' differences such as cognitive diversity in the student body were compared and contrasted with the 'new' differences resulting from increasing cultural diversity. It is important to note that cultural diversity is in itself not a new phenomenon in VET but the rate at which it has grown, especially in the last ten years, had made it more and more urgent to take into consideration. Furthermore, traditional and new differences often overlap in students: a student may, for example, require special support due to a learning

disability in addition to requiring support for language learning and help adjusting to Finnish society and education system. In this way traditional differences such as students' motivation problems in completing a vocational qualification or a learning disability such dyslexia can be combined with new differences such as short duration of residency in Finland and lack of prior basic education. *Difference* encompassed several different dimensions, each with its own objectification/s.

The experts objectified multiculturalism in the following ways: *personalization*, *prayer moments* and *face veils.* Personalization is at the center of how new and traditional differences were understood. The VET experts objectified multiculturalism in the new concept of personalization, which was introduced in the reformed legislation as a systemic remedy for helping VET providers handle the increasing homogeneity in the student body. Personalization is intended for all students and, despite some minor provisions aimed at easing the educational pathways of recent migrants to Finland, does not differentiate between students whether they are youths or adults, completing an upper-secondary degree or undergoing vocational re-training. Personalization is in itself not a new concept in VET but the extent to which it is meant to steer the new system cannot be over-emphasized. It is no wonder then that multiculturalism would largely be explained in terms of this newly introduced guiding principle, which became a sort of symbol of the changing world of VET.

Personalization was criticized by some of the VET experts because although they admitted it was necessary to develop more individual learning pathways, they also expressed fear that too much individualization could result in a hyper-individualistic society where the social fabric that keeps people together in society has weakened. Increasing cultural diversity was one dimension of this greater social trend towards individualization, which critics argue needs to be balanced by fostering a new sense of community. These critics argue that in order to ensure cooperation and social justice between different individuals, there needs to be a stable and solid basis from which all kinds of differences can be recognized. It is the duty of the government to create this basis for commonality between citizens and residents. Without such a platform, society risks degenerating into anarchy as individual differences increase and social bonds are weakened.

The experts also objectified difference in other more concrete ways. Prayer moments and face veils were concrete and iconic examples of cultural and religious difference that play a role in the everyday rule-making and institutional culture of vocational education. The face veil is a particularly concrete objectification of multiculturalism since it is highly visible and a symbolic example of cultural difference. The face veil is strongly associated with Muslim migration and integration into Western societies, and the degree to which religious and ideological differences should be recognized and tolerated is one of the most contentious issues of debate in contemporary European discourse on multiculturalism. From this perspective, it makes sense that the VET experts would use such concrete examples of religious and cultural difference to visualize and represent multiculturalism.

Community

Multiculturalism was anchored in the notion of community. Community in this context refers to the field of human interaction taking place within and around vocational institutes, working life and the social life of different people living, studying and working in Finland. Many of the respondents stressed how important it is for VET institutes to be vibrant, welcoming communities facilitating the integration of students from different backgrounds into Finnish society. This is especially important for adult migrants, who often have to start with little or no knowledge of the surrounding cultural and social environment and for whom the VET institute is one of the main avenues of social and economic integration. Many participants emphasized the socializing role that community participation plays in vocational education and training.

Some of the experts expressed worry that over-emphasizing individualization could lead to a collapse in students' sense of community in VET institutes, which could lead to negative consequences such as increased stress and competition, polarization between 'good students' and 'bad students', social isolation, mental health problems and so forth. The respondents felt that communities were important in creating safe and stable learning environments in which increasing cultural diversity could be managed in a safe and fair way. Some respondents' felt that the new focus on individualization threatens this notion of community. Furthermore, as the respondents pointed out, increasing cultural diversity means that the concept of

community needs to be updated to better take into account the co-existence of different cultures and promote constructive dialogue.

In the context of community, multiculturalism was objectified as *common rules, citizen development* and *intercultural competence.* Multiculturalism entails constant negotiation over rules and norms in society and local communities. Common rules were an objectification of the need to prevent social fragmentation and function as a basis for community. This objectification could also have been anchored to difference and security as these are interrelated, however, in this case common rules specifically focused on building and maintaining a sense of community in VET. A few respondents objectified multiculturalism in terms of citizenship development because of fear that the over-individualization of VET could lead to the deterioration of community values. They were adamant that VET must strive to produce citizens who are capable of handling their social responsibility and civic duties; otherwise we will end up living in an increasingly dangerous and dysfunctional society. This concern is all the more pressing because increasing cultural diversity and the public response to it means that numerous competing visions of society are in circulation, some of which are incompatible with the principles of the Finnish constitution.

The final objectification of multiculturalism as intercultural competence refers to the need for students and staff in vocational education to develop better and more fluid intercultural skills, which can take the form of diversity and dialogue training and becoming familiar with different cultures. Multiculturalism requires society to spend resources on improving the critical faculties of its citizenry. Dialogue and diversity go hand in hand because it is through dialogue that different social groups' interests and needs are negotiated. One of the respondents directly linked intercultural competence with sustainable development, heralding the latter as an example of social change that has successfully entered popular culture in the last few decades and changed people's thinking and everyday habits. People have become aware of the importance of sustainable development and changes to ordinary everyday habits such as the introduction of recycling are increasingly popular. What was originally scientific thinking has become popularized and transformed into social and institutional practice. In the same way, intercultural skills need to be made into a part of common sense in order for it to be a natural part of the way people think.

Security

Security was another anchor of multiculturalism in the experts' speech. It consisted of several interconnected themes, ranging from the myth of Finland as a law-abiding country where people inherently follow the rules to respondents' worries about radicalization and potential threats to social stability. In the same way as difference and community, security is a familiar concept in the field of vocational education and training. However, like both of these, security has began to take on new meanings in recent years with the social changes brought about by both increasing cultural diversity as well as the reform of VET. The system of VET is not only responsible for providing a safe learning environment for students, it is also responsible, in large part, for ensuring the smooth transition of students into law-abiding and well-adjusted citizens and taxpayers. Ensuring social stability can therefore be thought of as a vital function of VET, a trend that is also reflected in other European countries. Particularly important is the integration of migrants and students from a migrant background into Finnish society.

Multiculturalism was anchored to security, which was in turn objectified as *rule-Finland, social stability, political and religious radicalism* and *wrongdoing*. Rule-Finland (sääntö-Suomi) is a colloquial term with a sarcastic undertone, implying that Finnish society is inhibited by a desire for excessive orderliness, which stifles creativity and slows down complex problem solving and makes dealing with ambiguity more difficult. In the context of multiculturalism in VET, rule-Finland referred to the way Finnish institutions and staff responds to change, especially if it comes about suddenly. In the everyday reality of vocational institutes this can be seen, for example, in the question of what kind of identification asylum-seekers need to have before they can begin their studies. The respondent argues that it is no longer feasible or reasonable to make a common rule for each specific situation but that the institutional culture means that staff members still insist on such bureaucracy.

The question of rule making is also connected with the reform of VET, whereby there is no longer a "one-size-fits-all" style of education but where education is personalized to fit the needs of each individual. In doing so, it is inevitable that students will no longer all have to do the same things. The new importance of personalization in VET is indicative of a larger

cultural transformation that Finland is currently undergoing, whereby the focus is on the individual rather than the collective. From a security perspective this means that VET providers will have to learn to be more flexible and take risks when it comes to organizing education. If each student is given a personalized learning pathway, it is not guaranteed that these will all work out. Tolerating uncertainty and making exceptions based on individual needs is something that staff in VET institutes need time to learn.

The objectifications *social stability*, *political and religious radicalism* and *wrongdoing* represent a more explicit dimension of security. They captured the respondents' worries and anxieties about what increasing cultural diversity combined with the newly reformed legislation may lead to in the future. The three objectifications formed a cluster of threats posed by marginalization and social unrest. For example, the excerpt about social stability refers to the fear of a backlash towards migrants from the Finnish-speaking population angry at the failure of migrants to integrate into the workforce and pay their fair share of taxes. Social stability is threatened from two directions simultaneously – marginalized Finns as well as marginalized migrants. This same dynamic can be seen in how one respondent referred to both political and religious radicalism: the right-wing populist radicalism amongst Finns as well as the religious radicalism of Muslim migrants. The radicalism of these two distinct factions feed off one another, forcing authorities to develop new countermeasures to prevent tension and conflict from spreading.

Wrongdoing is used to objectify the beginning stages of social unrest: marginalization begins with delinquency and disengagement with social norms, which is objectified in the image of young people hanging out at the central railway station in Helsinki and getting into trouble. This can be the first step on the path to radicalization and dropping out of society, which may eventually threaten social stability if the problem becomes more widespread. Individualized learning pathways are good if can help students engage and commit to education but if they fail and more students begin dropping out from VET, the likelihood of students from especially vulnerable groups (such as underprivileged migrants and Finns) ending up in trouble increases. VET has a social responsibility to help give young people hope and faith in themselves and in society. There has always been a tension between the dual mission of VET to help disadvantaged and at-risk youth and to train the best possible workers.

Equality

Multiculturalism was anchored to equality. This is not surprising because equality is one of the core values in the Finnish educational system and something that all respondents commented upon and brought up in the interviews. Once again, a familiar concept is undergoing a process of dynamic change, both as a result of increasing cultural diversity as well changes in educational policy. The familiar and natural is taking on a new form due to changes in the environment. The way experts understand the concept of equality is changing in order to meet the new demands placed on our education system by a more diverse student body. This process of re-evaluating what equality means and how it can be achieved creates tension and conflict, which is reflected in the respondents' speech.

Equality was objectified in the following way: *birthright*, *ethnic profiling*, *model of success* and *low-skill migrant jobs*. The issue of birthright came up in relation to ethnic and cultural background; which groups or individuals have the right to define what is Finnish culture and who is Finnish? Birthright succinctly captures this question and goes to the heart of the Finnish nationalist myth, which has seen a revival in political discourse in recent years. Fundamentally, birthright is a question of position and status because those who have it are allowed to wield power and seek to maintain their privileges over those who are not included. The question of "who is Finnish?" can be based on either exclusion or inclusion, making it one of the most contentious contemporary discussions in Finnish political culture.

Ethnic profiling is another objectification that goes to the core of equality. From the perspective of VET, ethnic profiling refers to the tendency to treat the wishes and desires of migrants and students from a migrant background as secondary to what the labor market or educational system needs. It is an umbrella-term for a range of different phenomena, connecting discriminatory practices in the education system with more blatant forms of discrimination in society, such as police illegally checking people's identities based on skin color. The term has entered Finnish language through the political and academic discourse in societies with a longer history of multiculturalism, where ethnic profiling has sparked political and social resistance and where there is greater tension between the government authorities and those being governed. At its core, ethnic profiling is about the dominant group

controlling and managing minority groups through the unjust use of power. There must be a balance between individual and collective interests so that each person is given the opportunity to purse their dreams while simultaneously ensuring that the important sectors such as healthcare have sufficient labor force. Needless to say, in reality this is easier said than done.

The third objectification of equality is the model of success. This refers to the growing gap in educational attainment between different groups of students. The white girl with braided hair who reads lots of books is the symbolic winner in the Finnish education system, while many students from a migrant background barely develop the basic skills necessary to enter Finnish working life. Compensating and correcting for deficiencies in basic skills is a major issue in vocational education. Students are supposed to be learning a vocation, not just re-learning skills that they should already have acquired in comprehensive education. The image of the Finnish girl who reads lots of books captures the structural inequality of outcomes. The same image is often employed in popular discussion on educational attainment, especially in relation to boys' educational underachievement. In the context of multiculturalism, it takes on a new meaning because high-achieving girls are not only ahead of boys as a group, they are also far ahead of migrants and students with a migrant background.

The final objectification of equality is the iconic image of low-skill migrant jobs. This is another cliché that is regularly used in public discourse about multiculturalism. Occupying the lowest-rung of working life, mistreated by customers, unable to navigate or speak Finnish, the image of the Somali taxi-driver symbolizes the economic polarization that is taking place in Finland. Low-paid, low-skilled migrant workers are symbols of the growing inequality and disparity in opportunity. The emergence of second-class of citizens in the form of migrants and socioeconomically deprived Finns symbolizes the return of a stratified society in which one's position and status is dependent on parental level of education and wealth and not on one's own merits. The fear of growing inequality was a major part of the experts' concern about multiculturalism.

Economic productivity

Multiculturalism was anchored to economic productivity, which has always been a major factor in VET policy and is the driving force behind the recent reform. The respondents' objectifications about economic productivity include *urban growth/rural stagnation*, *economic problems* and *employed/unemployed*. Each captures a piece of the complex panorama of economic uncertainty and competition. Labor market integration and the ability to create long working life careers are vital from an economic perspective, especially considering the economic situation in Finland where the proportion of the working population is decreasing while the amount of retirees is steadily increasing. Out of all the social groups in Finland, migrants and those from a migrant background are over-represented amongst the unemployed and this troubling situation is a normal part of discourse about the economic effects of immigration in Finland. The instrumental economic value of VET is undergoing change as it is tasked with improving the economic productivity of the migrant population in Finland.

There is an ongoing debate in Finnish society about how to manage the simultaneous problem of an employment mismatch and labor shortage caused by the geographical distribution of the population. Increasing cultural diversity is mainly concentrated in urban centers while most rural areas are slowly stagnating. Harsh government austerity policy has set people against each other so that in areas of rural stagnation people complain about the welfare-dependent immigrant loafers in the urban areas while in the cities they complain about how rural areas are economically drains on the resources created by urban growth. The conflict and tension related to economic productivity played a major role in the experts' understanding of multiculturalism.

In summary it can be stated that the VET experts anchored and objectified multiculturalism to the things that were most salient and relevant for them as policy-making professionals and citizens. The experts anchored multiculturalism to numerous critical issues in VET that the current reform has disrupted or changed. The objectifications were in turn iconic examples of changes brought about by increasing cultural diversity. The anchors and objectifications made it possible for the experts to capture the abstract phenomenon of multiculturalism into a

concrete form and open it up for discussion. In doing so, they expanded the scope of their discussion of multiculturalism beyond bureaucratic and technical aspects of migrant education, connecting it with a larger social discourse about the direction that Finnish society is developing.

6.4 Meta-representations of multiculturalism in the VET experts' speech

Analyzing experts' meta-representations of multiculturalism in the context of VET was challenging. Most of the experts' speech that was explicitly political in nature revolved around the VET reform. Generally speaking, almost all of their speech was on a high level of abstraction and also metarepresentational in nature, focusing on systemic institutional processes and practices. The majority of it focused on the tension and friction between different schools of thought about how VET should be developed. However, the relevance of these VET policy-linked metarepresentational perspectives is of limited use for understanding multiculturalism.

It is possible to identify certain narrower but explicitly meta-representational views of multiculturalism in the VET experts' speech despite their tendency to focus on educational policy. These meta-representations are complex and dynamic, drawing upon a wide cascade of different politicized positions in the interpretative grid of multiculturalism in Finnish society. The experts used VET as a kind of backdrop for a larger social struggle that is playing out and in which they themselves have a part to play. Some experts reflected on their own position explicitly while others tended to distance themselves from it. Nonetheless, the experts recognized that a struggle between different visions for the future is taking place and VET is one of its most important battlegrounds in the education sector. The respondents positioned themselves as national experts responsible for steering and developing the institutional and systemic framework in which this struggle is being played out. By doing so they are actively contributing to the future of Finland and shaping it according to what they think is correct from both a pragmatic and moral perspective.

Most if not all of the extracts in the thematic analysis could be analyzed in more detail from a metarepresentational perspective. However, to conserve space I have selected some of the clearest examples. I will first present three depictions of common sense thinking that experts attributed to the way laypeople think about multiculturalism. Afterwards, I will critically examine how the experts use these metarepresentations to position themselves as principled defenders of the liberal-humanist system of values that the Finnish education system and society has historically rested upon.

It was obviously important for experts to demonstrate that they were in touch with the way ordinary people think about immigration and multiculturalism and why these make so many people angry and afraid. Almost all of the experts emphasized the importance of economic insecurity and growing inequality as underlying motivations for prejudice, as can be seen in the following extracts:

> H2: *"(...) now Finland needs more people from abroad because otherwise we can't get all the work done and then people are sitting at home unemployed and upset thinking "How so? There's no work for me either."*

> H7: *"(...) they're afraid that their jobs will be taken when they graduate at the same time. So like "oh, are we now competing for the same places? Am I going to go without one even though I was born here and I've paid my taxes, so am I going to end up without a job then?"*

> H11: *"But then if your own situation is sort of... maybe there's a competitive situation of "who gets the job?" then this sort of divisiveness could probably emerge, like "should we think of native Finns or new Finns or what?"*

The extracts above are founded on a number of metarepresentative presuppositions that are worth examining more closely. First of all, the narratives are based on at least three different meanings of "them": the experts are clearly referring to specific subgroups of people. One of these groups obviously refers to marginalized, desperate Finns whose thinking the experts are

narrating. Within this narrative, there is a second "them" referring to migrants. In essence, the experts are framing anti-immigrant Finns as a particular community of belief that is held together by shared opposition to another community of belief formed by migrants and proponents of multiculturalism. The experts demonstrate awareness and even empathy for this group of troubled citizens and in doing so also position themselves as being "in touch", as if in anticipation of criticism for their own relatively privileged positions as system-architects. The experts are making it clear that they do not think that they are somehow better than those that are rattled by multiculturalism because people's view are fundamentally linked to their relative socioeconomic position. In doing so the experts are also living up to their liberal-humanist values according to which people can give up even vile opinions under the right circumstances.

The third group, one not explicitly presented in the narratives but still an inseparable part of the equation, is the VET experts themselves. Rather than demonizing Finns that are taking out their anxiety and pain on others or attributing prejudice to individual psychological factors, the respondents use metarepresentative strategies to reinforce their own identity as experts. Through such displays of meta-knowledge they underline their own expertise: showing that they know how people think within the institutional framework that they are responsible for monitoring and developing. By focusing on the macro-level processes that are wreaking chaos in the ecosystem that they are responsible for managing, they are also demonstrating the difficulty of their work and how hard it is to change things. The logical follow-up question is that if improving social conditions can change people's attitudes and lessen prejudice, why don't those with power provide more resources to the system-architects to do exactly that?

The experts use the voices of stereotyped anti-immigrant Finns to prove their point that resistance to multiculturalism is fundamentally about economics. The experts portray people as being interested primarily in their own lives: in completing their studies, finding work, paying taxes. These micro-social perspectives are juxtaposed with the experts' own macro-social perspectives to give an idea of how common sense thinking operates in regards to multiculturalism. Experts are needed because they can see the big picture and ensure that systemic challenges such as unemployment are adequately tackled. At the same time, by expressing empathy for those that have become bitter and cynical, the respondents are

acknowledging the fact that institutional responses have failed to prevent polarization. For many people in the marginalized camp, institutional responses have been ineffective or even counterproductive. There is widespread suspicion of not only inadequate capability but also dishonest or malicious intent on the part of experts.

Working life is another important dimension of the VET experts' metarepresentative reflections. Naturally, it is important for the experts that students and those who have finished their vocational qualifications are treated well in working life but once a student graduates, each person is on their own. The VET experts acknowledge that the institutional structures they are responsible for are having a hard time keeping up with the multiculturalization of working life. There are limitations to what the VET experts can and cannot influence and working life is essentially out of their jurisdiction:

> H8: *"There are definitely trades in vocational education or working life where no matter how well you speak Finnish, finding employment is extremely difficult due to people's attitudes. So it could be that you've gotten an education just fine and everything is okay and you graduate with high hopes but when you go out to look for work in that field they look down their noses at you. Like you have to be impossibly good to find a place in working life."*

> *H10: "And something that we don't have yet that we could use, because working life is multiculturalizing at such a terrible pace, is diversity and dialogue training and kind of cultural familiarization for people from Finnish backgrounds. Cultural sensitivity and the like haven't played a very strong part in our professionalism. In many VET qualifications, showing that you can communicate and understand hasn't really been part of our brand at all."*

The multiculturalization of working life means that there is a need to provide training not only to migrants but also to people from Finnish backgrounds who work with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. The respondent connects the ability to interact smoothly with people from different cultures to the "brand" of VET as well as to new professional

requirements. By referring to “us” and “our”, the second respondent is clearly positioning those working with VET as sharing responsibility for making sure that the brand of VET stays up to date. There is an interesting contrast between the two extracts: the first one expresses a skeptical attitude towards preventing discrimination in working life while the second invokes concrete suggestions that could be utilized to do this. This contrast between optimism and pessimism runs across much of the interview data and revolves around the struggle for power between the critics and proponents of the VET reform. Those critical of the reform are not convinced that giving more responsibility to working life for the education of VET students is something that will benefit individual students or the system. This school of thought emphasized the importance of state response to help disadvantaged students such as migrants succeed in building their lives. The second extract does not deny the challenge but focuses more on practical solutions and argues that creating and appropriate content for dealing with cultural diversity is in the interest of both educators and workplaces. It is unnecessary to go into more detail on the metarepresentations utilized by the two schools of thought in the VET reform. This is an example of how they differed in terms of world-making assumptions about what is and is not possible or likely to succeed in helping to facilitate multiculturalism in Finnish working life.

Metarepresentations were critical to VET experts’ social representation of multiculturalism. The metarepresentative dimension forms the basic interpretative grid on which the experts positioned themselves as a particular group in relation to other social groups. Their complex and dynamic analysis of multiculturalism in VET rests upon this process of examining different groups in relation to each other while simultaneously demonstrating awareness of their own position. This is most clearly discernible in the extracts where the experts give voice to the marginalized, revealing how they see this particular group’s thinking, motivation and argumentation. In doing so, they are setting up the possibility for an institutional response to this thinking and creating a social identity for themselves as experts. While on this issue there appears to be cohesion, the main share of metarepresentative reflection in the data shows that the experts are divided into different schools of thought with long-standing historical conflicting interests and visions for the future of VET. It is not possible to go into detail about the intra-expert conflicts because they are not immediately relevant to multiculturalism.

However, despite their differences, the VET experts were unified in their defense of the humanist-liberal values underpinning Finnish education and society.

7. Discussion

The results presented in the previous chapter illustrate the complex nature of VET experts' social representations of multiculturalism. In this final chapter, I will first provide a synthesis of my results by answering each research question before connecting them with theoretical perspectives. After the research questions have been answered, I will move on to examining the methodological benefits and limitations of this study and conclude by offering potential future directions for research.

7.1 Synthesis of results

1) How does multiculturalism appear in the context of vocational education and training in the VET experts' speech?

Multiculturalism appears in many different ways in the context of vocational education and training in the VET experts' speech. Experts tended to make sense of multiculturalism in terms of how it fit in to the larger picture of the reformed system of VET. It was largely understood in terms of the increasing cultural diversity in the student body and Finnish society in general, and how this affects the organization and management of VET. Vocational education and training plays a major role in the integration of migrants and students with a migrant background into the education system, working life and Finnish society (OECD, 2018b). The large amount of interview data necessitated the creation of a classification system for organizing and handling the data in a systematic way. The resulting classifications into local, intergroup and systemic modes of talk proved essential in uncovering commonalities and differences between respondents' perspectives.

In the local mode of talk, the VET experts made sense of multiculturalism in terms of local practices and social relations involving students, staff and vocational institute administration. The everyday lived reality of multiculturalism on a grassroots level with students and staff in vocational institutes was emphasized. Multiculturalism was often discussed in terms of increasing diversity in the student body and the effects that this has on organizing and maintaining a sense of order and accommodating cultural differences in the daily reality of vocational education. Personalization was a theme that came up multiple times in the research data, because it was one of the most significant changes in the new legislation and something that local authorities were responsible for implementing. Diversity and personalization are interconnected because the goal of the reformed VET system is to better recognize the students' diverse skills and needs through the personalization process. Staff and administrators are responsible for the practical implementation of the new legislation: they are the ones who must create local applications for national policy. This means figuring out how to facilitate students' individual needs as well as managing and controlling the changes brought on by the "circumstances of multiculturalism" (Kelly, 2002) in day-to-day life.

The intergroup mode of talk was largely based on respondents' speech about intergroup relations between so-called native Finns and migrants as well as students from a migrant background. Many respondents emphasized the importance of dialogue in developing mutual understanding and preventing prejudice and societal polarization in the context of vocational education and training. According to the respondents, increasing cultural diversity is a source of tension and anxiety amongst some native Finns due to socioeconomic uncertainty and the growing competition for workplaces. Opposition to multiculturalism was framed in terms of socioeconomic, intergenerational and also cultural differences related to different family values. Multiculturalism was explained in terms of social and socioeconomic power relations between different ethnic and cultural groups, with VET and working life both playing a major role in the facilitation of positive social relations.

In the systemic mode of talk, VET experts connected the challenges that individuals and groups face to the institutional and organizational reality of vocational education and life in modern Finland. The experts did this mainly through offering macro-social explanations for a variety of situations that came to mind in the context of multiculturalism. In their responses

the experts demonstrated an understanding that migrants are a heterogeneous group with different needs. At the same time, however, there are common challenges that migrants face because Finnish education is still struggling to come up with an adequate systemic response to increasing cultural diversity in the student body. The experts also made it clear that multiculturalism also means that more work needs to be done to assuage the fears and frustrations of native Finns and this is particularly important to take into consideration in vocational institutes and working life relations. VET is at the forefront of ensuring peaceful co-existence and social stability, whether this means developing better practices for personalization so that students are not ethnically profiled into certain sectors or creating spaces for dialogue about multiculturalism in the everyday schedule of vocational institutes.

The experts' speech about multiculturalism varied widely. Overall, however, a large part of what they said - especially certain respondents – revolved around the new legislation and its perceived benefits and limitations, both for society in general and migrant education in particular. This makes sense because the experts were selected on the basis of their professional roles and the interviews were explicitly framed as specifically relating to the context of multiculturalism in VET. Furthermore, in a system with approximately 140 education providers of widely varying profiles, it is difficult to find a more common denominator than the new legislation that ties all of them together.

Untangling educational policy from multiculturalism proved particularly difficult in the thematic analysis. The reformed legislative framework of vocational education makes up the new terrain on which the process of multiculturalism is now taking place. How the experts understood these challenges defined their relationship to the new legislation. As such, the experts' social representations of multiculturalism depend in large part on what they thought of the reformed vocational educational policy. For most of the respondents, multiculturalism is one part of a larger process of social transformation challenging Finland to develop its educational system in order to keep up with the times (cf. Tervasmäki & Tomperi, 2018). The way in which the experts made sense of these changing circumstances in VET influenced their understanding of multiculturalism.

The three modes of talk represent different levels of expertise and problem solving when it comes to multiculturalism in VET. The experts' speech involved constant overlap and crossroads, with experts moving back and forth between different levels of analysis. These transitions also reflected the experts' professional profiles: those closest to the grassroots level had a particular fundamental experiential dimension with a corresponding mode of knowledge, while those experts working closer to the political sphere had their own experiences and ideas. It is important to recall that the experts had long professional careers behind and had often occupied a variety of different positions, some institutional and others closer to the grassroots level of VET institutes. It is only natural that there would be overlap between different modes of knowledge, because being able to understand a particular problem from many points of view is one hallmark of mature expertise.

In addition, all of the experts switched between speaking as high-level experts and more common sense thinking. This was clear when the language they used became less technical and their points of interests more easily applicable to the lives of non-experts. Jovchelovitch (2002) argues that the co-existence of different rationalities is a common feature of human thinking and allows us to live and be seen in different ways. It appears that the experts occasionally wanted to also present themselves as non-experts, as civilians or ordinary people. Rochira (2014) argues that examining the interaction between expert and lay modes of knowledge can provide insight into how specific professional settings produce particular social representations. The experts' used multiple voices to emphasize or, alternatively, to blue the line between their knowledge as experts and lay knowledge. Such polyphasic communication could be employed to give an impression of well roundedness and make the experts more relatable. Alternatively, it could make them appear even more humble, astute and cognizant of the social complexity involved in multiculturalism.

2) Does VET experts' speech contain elements that can be interpreted as social representations of multiculturalism?

VET experts' speech contained numerous elements that can be interpreted as social representations of multiculturalism. The experts understood multiculturalism in two main ways: 1) in terms of the increasing cultural diversity in the student body, which is a key

demographic change in Finnish VET in the last twenty years and 2) in terms of the institutional response to changes in Finnish education and society, as formulated in the VET reform. Multiculturalism was therefore understood as both the phenomenon of increasing cultural diversity as well as the institutional response to this phenomenon. This way of understanding reflects Viitakainen's (2013) distinction between descriptive and normative understandings of multiculturalism. Increasing cultural diversity in VET is descriptive while the responses to it are normative. For the experts, multiculturalism was synonymous with migration and migrant groups - indigenous groups such as the Saami or Roma were barely mentioned.

The VET experts generally agreed over the descriptive "circumstances of multiculturalism" (Kelly, 2002) while the normative question of how it should be handled proved much more complicated. In the reformed VET legislation, the needs of individual students have been given precedence (Räisänen & Goman, 2018). Most of the experts agreed that the growing gap in learning outcomes between native Finns and migrants, including students from a migrant background, is best tackled by focusing on improving students' personal learning pathways. According to this logic, if each individual's personal learning pathway is successful, this will lead to positive end-results for students from different ethnic and cultural groups and, ultimately, to positive end-results for Finnish society as the gaps in educational achievement narrow. Multiculturalism, however, is about more than just the individual; it is also a collective phenomenon. Critics of the reform charged that there is very little provision in the new VET system related to groups, communities and society in general.

The individualization and multiculturalization of VET are symbiotic phenomena, each influencing and building upon the other. Multiculturalism is inherently a collective phenomenon because it presupposes the existence of different groups formed by individuals who share a particular culture. Defining and demarcating culture is not easy but few would deny the existence of different cultures, or the collective nature of culture. The experts made sense of multiculturalism against the backdrop of increasing cultural diversity occurring simultaneously with the growing hegemony of individualism in Finnish society. The hegemony of individualism was manifested in the narrow focus on personalization in meeting the challenge of multiculturalism in VET. The experts described a multifaceted process of

social and institutional transformation taking place in VET that I have decided to call "cultural individualization" because it treats culture as a non-issue or at a best as an individual characteristic rather than as a group function.

Increasing individualization in the education system has been connected to neoliberalism, which some theorists argue has become the dominant ideology guiding global and Finnish educational policy (Rinne, 2011; Tervasmäki & Tomperi, 2018). The VET reform appears to be taking neoliberal ideology to the next level in its conceptualization of culture as just an extension of the individual. In doing so it atomizes a fundamentally social phenomenon into its constituent parts. The new system of VET is unable to recognize and deal with collective dimensions of human life. Cultural individualization did not develop in a vacuum but is part of a historical process where individual responsibility is canonized in education and social responsibility is understood in terms of how it benefits the individual (Rinne, 2011). The relationship between individual and collective was a major source of tension reflecting the long-term ideological and political divide amongst the experts. In large part the experts' position in regards to this divide defined how they perceived multiculturalism. Those critical of the reform expressed worry that the individualist school of thought in VET policy-making had successfully managed to strengthen and expand its hegemonic position into new areas, including multiculturalism and migrant education. They did not reject personalization itself, which critics agreed was a crucial step forward for the educational success of migrants and students from a migrant background. However, they felt that the push for individualization had gone too far because it now defined every part of the new system and group, community and societal interests had been marginalized.

Recognition and accommodation of group differences is the starting point for multicultural policy (e.g. Kauff et al, 2013). The relationship between individual and society is in large part defined by the particular social group that an individual belongs to and the relative social position that this group occupies. As noted by Elceroth and colleagues (2011), human thinking takes on a distinctly political tone once it shifts from "I am a human being and demand to be recognized as such" to a collective understanding and articulation that "we are human beings and demand to be recognized as such." At the heart of the VET experts' understanding of multiculturalism is the tension between individual and group recognition.

For critics of the reform, cultural individualization represents another step on the path of replacing social responsibility with individual responsibility. For these critics, the disappearance of particular target groups such as migrants and students from a migrant background from the legislation is both a symbolic and concrete weakening of the old system which, despite its clumsiness and problems, provided at least a semblance of recognition by dividing students into different groups and allowing for resources to be allocated to each group according to their needs. In the new system of cultural individualization, such mechanisms of institutional control have been removed and only the individual is recognized.

Experts' general consensus on the legislation was that it delegates a great deal of responsibility to local VET providers, including responsibility for recognizing cultural diversity and handling the everyday reality of multiculturalism. There is a great deal of variety in the capacity and understanding of VET providers to recognize and facilitate questions related to multiculturalism. With so many VET providers and no comprehensive national framework on multiculturalism, it is likely that some providers are up to the task while others are not. Furthermore, if facilitating multiculturalism is at the discretion of the VET provider, this can lead to a situation where the staff and management in VET institutes consciously or unconsciously favor the dominant Finnish culture that they themselves are most familiar with while treating everything else as, at best, curiosity or, at worst, examples of cultural practices and conceptions that need to be corrected. Needless to say, such an uncritical and biased position will not help in fostering safe, positive and socially just interactions where different cultural groups are allowed to develop their voices and be heard.

Reducing culture to an individual property or characteristic and keeping collective cultural expression in the margins means that Finnish society loses the opportunity to let different individuals and groups meet each other on the playing field of human interaction. Because vocational institutes generally lack a functioning conversational culture where important social phenomena such as multiculturalism can be discussed, constructive and nuanced conversation is unlikely to spontaneously appear on its own. If something as socially divisive as multiculturalism goes unaddressed by the institutional culture of VET, it may result in an alternative, unofficial conversational culture emerging amongst students and staff where unsanctioned and even dangerous ideas become the norm. Certainly students and staff in VET

will continue to be interested in more than just their own personalized pathways and professional situations. Group identities based on culture and ethnicity will continue to play a role in the future. However, without institutional support for the creation of a fact-based, progressive conversation, groups seeking to further their own divisive political and religious agendas may be able hijack these issues for their own purposes. Multiculturalism will be discussed one way or the other in VET; the question is, how will this conversation be led and by whom?

3) How was multiculturalism anchored and objectified by the VET experts?

Multiculturalism was anchored to five interconnected concepts, which reflect the changing reality of the newly reformed system of vocational education and training. Difference, community, security, equality and economic productivity are all familiar issues for those working in vocational education. Each of these is part of both the everyday reality of vocational institutes and plays a prominent role in decision-making and policy. All five anchors have their place in both the new and the old legislation. According to Moscovici (1984), social representations emerge in times of turbulence and change, when new ideas challenge old ones, forcing people to make sense of and master their social environment. Cultural individualization is the name that I have given to describe the process of social and institutional transformation, which has disrupted the "old world" of VET and is replacing it with something new. This disruption and transformation explains why VET policy-makers understand multiculturalism through these five anchors. Each of the five anchors is familiar yet undergoing rapid and sometimes radical transformation. Old understandings have become inadequate to account for the rapid changes taking place in society. The VET experts' sense making of multiculturalism reflects the changes in policy and social environment.

The experts explain the social transformation that is taking place in Finnish VET in different ways with some experts attributing it to changes in the political and ideological make-up of society and others connecting it to inevitable global development. The way they contextualized the process of social transformation taking place also affected how the experts anchored multiculturalism in VET. Those critical of the VET reform and the present political and ideological direction in which the system is developed argued that economic productivity

is being overemphasized at the expense of other societal and cultural factors. They argue that while difference, community, security and equality are commonly talked about in regards to multiculturalism in VET, in reality there is very little substance in the new legislation about these issues. From this perspective, the overriding goal of the new reform in regards to multiculturalism as well as other social issues is to maximize individual economic productivity. Those in favor of the reform argue that it is precisely by focusing and improving economic productivity that difference, community, security and equality can all be addressed. From their perspective, individualization is a logical and natural response to changes in the local and global environment, not something inherently political or ideological.

The experts objectified multiculturalism in many different ways. For example, images implying non-Finnish cultural expression such as prayer moments and face veils were employed to demarcate cultural diversity. Multiculturalism was objectified in terms of concrete and abstract practices transforming the social and political order in VET, forcing administrators and policy-makers to make changes to promote inclusion and peaceful co-existence. It was also objectified in perceived threats to social stability such as radicalism and juvenile delinquency. The experts objectified multiculturalism in terms of social relations between native and non-native Finns and how these are affected by economic competition and polarization between different segments of Finnish society. The experts emphasized economics as key to determining the social relations between different social groups. The objectifications reflected the VET experts' attempts to address the issue of multiculturalism from a common-sense perspective that would reflect the tensions and conflicts taking place on the grassroots level of VET. The experts often employed colloquial expressions to underline the social impact of multiculturalism in the context of VET. Furthermore, experts appeared to reflect on their personal relationship to multiculturalism through the use of vulgar or "street smart" objectifications, suggesting that objectifications involved a more common sense line of thinking with less focus on expertise and professional profile.

The entire system of vocational education is struggling to make sense of and adjust to the changes in the new VET legislation. It is no wonder then that the experts' anchors and objectifications are attempts to bridge the gap between old and new, to create a sense of continuity and allow for re-orientation. As Philogène (1999) argues, the act of naming is

integral to the production of new social representations. The reformed legislation introduced many new terms while simultaneously re-defining old ones. In order to find a steady position on the new interpretative grid of VET, the experts must re-learn the language of their trade. The transformation is not only taking place in the surrounding world – it is also reflected in the experts' internalization of this new world. The VET reform involves much more than simply learning a set of new names; experts must master a new logic. Multiculturalism represents a specific venue in which this process of re-understanding is made visible. As an example of a sector or theme inside VET that has undergone complete upheaval, multiculturalism offers a solid yet flexible position against which the tools and *modus operandi* of the new system can be critically evaluated. Opponents of the reform used the contentious issue of multiculturalism to anchor and objectify their criticisms while supporters used it to legitimize and argue in favor of the changes.

The anchors and objectifications that the experts used form a cascade of open-ended questions and challenges that must be solved in the near future. Ultimately, all of the experts agreed that now that the new legislation is being implemented, it is going to take a long time before it is possible to say whether or not the stated goals of the reform, for example in regards to improving educational outcomes for migrants, were successful. Everyone acknowledge that problems will inevitably emerge in the aftermath and that these must be sorted out. Perhaps this is why those experts that were critical of the reform, once invited to participate in the interview, were excited and more than willing to speak candidly about multiculturalism: they were grateful for the chance to express their thoughts and worries about the reform. Multiculturalism provided a suitable framework through which they could to air their worries. The supporters of the reform were slightly more reticent because they were morally and professionally invested, yet they may have also felt obligated to defend their position and to practice speaking the new language of the system that had been put in place.

The work of educational policy is never finished; it proceeds incrementally and the big picture can often only be seen clearly in retrospect. The experts' anchors and objectifications provide clues and details about the "big picture" of multiculturalism forming in the horizon. Monitoring and reacting to both low-level and high-level signals is critical for successful educational policy because they can help reduce risks and focus resources where they are

needed. In this case, VET experts used objectifications and anchors as explanatory devices about critical issues that have come to their attention or that they are concerned about.

4) What kinds of meta-representations emerge in regards to multiculturalism in the VET experts' speech?

Elceroth et al (2011) argue that social representations are inherently political because they allow individuals and groups to navigate in a socially divided world. Examining the VET experts' speech from a metarepresentational perspective was highly illuminating in terms of understanding the political thinking that the experts employed in making sense of multiculturalism. Most of the experts' metarepresentations focused on either critiquing or defending the VET reform and educational policy in general. While interesting, these policy-related metarepresentations tended to move beyond the question of multiculturalism, which was at the center of this study. Almost all of the research data could be analyzed from a metarepresentations perspective because of it was highly abstract and replete with political reflections. However, the most interesting metarepresentations of multiculturalism consisted of experts' portrayals of common sense thinking about multiculturalism.

The experts' use of metarepresentations demonstrates that they understood multiculturalism to be part of the social transformation that is taking place in Finland and connected this with a corresponding and highly relevant political dimension. They tended to use metarepresentations to contextualize macro-social processes relevant to multiculturalism, for example to elaborate on what kinds of factors influence intergroup dynamics. Most explicitly these were connected to conflicts, tensions and debate over the future of multiculturalism in contemporary Finland. They identified different communities of belief locked in a struggle for the future. The most poignant examples of multiculturalism-related metarepresentations revolved around the competition for workplaces and relative social status between disadvantaged Finns and migrants. The experts' metarepresentations invoked ordinary Finns' social narratives of common sense thinking related to multiculturalism, which help them make sense of their life experiences and the rapidly changing world around them.

Through their metarepresentations, the experts formed a self-aware community of belief of their own. They displayed a highly sophisticated capacity for meta-knowledge with some of the experts even going so far as explicitly describing their own role as privileged system-architects. This insight and capacity for critical self-awareness also serves a political function. It is also a demonstration of their aptitude as experts. Without such a capacity for meta-knowledge, the experts' understanding of what is happening around them would be limited.

Despite their differences when it came to educational policy, the experts positioned themselves as defenders of a liberal-humanist system of values that rejects racism and supports multiculturalism. The experts formed a particular community of belief organized around their support for a set of values underlying the political doctrine of multiculturalism. The experts' nemeses or symbolic opponents are the right wing populists who have openly called into question the moral and philosophical system of values at the heart of Finnish education and society. Experts' social representation of multiculturalism was based on an underlying world-making assumption, meaning that they shared a vision of what the world should be like as well as what they do not want it to be like. They were afraid of the direction in which social and political discourse was developing and sought to counteract this in their own work as experts. The process of socially representing took place against the backdrop of institutional and organizational practices, which Elceroth et al. (2011) refer to as enacted communication. Experts utilized their professional knowledge of the ins and outs of these practices to defend the values that they felt were most important.

7.2 Methodological benefits and limitations

This study has a number of methodological limitations. First and foremost, because I interviewed only a small number of VET experts, the results cannot be generalized across other areas of expertise. The participants are not representative of either expert or general views on multiculturalism in VET. Nor is my definition of "VET expert" all-encompassing: I ended up selecting a rather elite sample of VET experts, all of who have contributed to policy-making on a national level. A random sample of VET experts including researchers

and politicians may have produced different results. Originally I intended to interview three different groups: policy-makers, local administration and VET institute staff and VET students but time constraints and other practical considerations forced me to focus data collection on the first two categories of experts. On the other hand, the participants were genuine experts of the VET context and knowledgeable in issues related to multiculturalism.

The question of multiculturalism proved to be a double-edged sword. On one hand it was something that experts were clearly aware of and had experience in working with. On the other hand, due to its sheer scale and abstract nature, it is not the easiest concept to concretize. It appears to me that the experts used the institutional and organizational practices of VET to "hold down" the concept and give it substance. This meant that multiculturalism was quite narrowed down and confined to explorations of its role in the system of VET. Nonetheless, experts spoke on multiple levels about the subject. In the end, multiculturalism in VET proved to be a meaningful and thought-provoking springboard for conversation with the experts.

The participants provided elaborated responses to my interview questions and, overall, the data obtained was of high quality. While participants often brought up themes without being prompted, it was the reformed VET legislation and perceived logic behind it that the experts used as the basis for most of their answers. If the participants had been asked to reflect on multiculturalism in their personal lives they would have likely answered quite differently. Now they mostly drew from their roles as policy-makers, administrators and professionals. The anonymity of the interviews also gave an opportunity for experts that are normally expected to refrain from publicly criticizing the given political agenda to vent their frustrations and express critical and conflicting points of view. Under the cover of anonymity, the actors could freely express their personal convictions even if these were not in line with their employers. They could also talk explicitly about different organizations and conflicting interests, something that is rarely possible to do openly. The participants also reflected critically on their own organizations and personal histories and discussed difficult cases, for example running into racism amongst colleagues or employees.

When interpreting the results, it should be taken into consideration that I knew the experts from my previous work history. This most likely influenced both the selection of participants

and our interaction during the interviews. In my previous professional role as an educational policy expert and advocate for VET students, I was very critical of certain aspects of the VET reform and the politics behind it. Some of the experts in this study were people with whom I had argued and collaborated with in various working groups and meetings. This time, however, I was in the role of researcher seeking scientific understanding of multiculturalism and the VET reform and they were in the role of research participants. The fact that I was professionally acquainted with the participants made it especially important to ensure their complete anonymity and remove any information that would make it easier to identify the names of individuals or organizations from the material. I also had to take this into consideration in the transcription and handling of the research material, since it contained sensitive information that could damage the professional reputations of the participants. From an ethical perspective, it was very important to balance the trust and respect that the respondents' showed to me with my responsibility to keep their identities concealed. Especially in the thematic analysis I had to go over the data numerous times to make sure that the chosen extracts were as safe and non-incriminating as possible.

In their extrapolation of a paradigm for research in social representation theory, Bauer & Gaskell (1999, p. 179) argue that the researcher should "abstain from the tendencies of social engineering" and cultivate a disinterested research attitude in order to develop sensitivity towards the world. I cannot honestly claim to have been disinterested when the study began. Indeed, the political nature and implications of the VET reform was something that some of the participants were divided about but which I personally took for granted. However, as the study proceeded I found myself coming to a deeper understanding of the different positions involved in the VET reform and becoming more cognizant and critical of my own initial assumptions. While I had set off to uncover "the truth about VET" and prove certain hypotheses regarding the political nature of the reform and how this related to multiculturalism, I ended up with a more nuanced and balanced view. The respondents who were in favor of the reform, especially in regards to what they perceived as its benefit to migrant education, put forth strong arguments that forced me to re-evaluate my own personal position. The results of the study would likely have been different had I interviewed experts with whom I had not worked previously or who occupied different positions, because they may have been considerably less candid. On the other hand, personal contacts and prior

professional experience were instrumental in giving me access to the exclusive world of policy-making experts and to understand the context in which their work takes place.

It was challenging to study the social representations of multiculturalism in VET by relying on key experts' interviews. Because the experts held leading positions in the field, the interviews involved talking about multiculturalism at a very high, systemic level of VET. Rather than addressing multiculturalism as an abstraction or in terms of personal beliefs, the interview discussions were anchored on concrete institutional and policy-dependent reality. Consequently, studying social representations of multiculturalism in the present context appeared more challenging than it most likely would have been in a different context closer to people's everyday living and working. At the same time, from a practical perspective, it was relatively easy for me to arrange meetings with the experts because there was very little bureaucracy involved.

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of my interpretations, I completed an extensive theoretical review of social-representation literature and put a great deal of effort into defining the analytic concepts that I employed. I tried to explain my analytic approaches comprehensively and mirroring my work against other relevant studies in the field of SRT. When reporting results of my analyses, I initially included numerous data extracts together with my interpretations so as to improve the transparency of the analysis. In the end, however, I was forced to limit the amount of interview material to make the text more reader-friendly. I feel that my interpretations were adequately connected to the available data.

The social representation framework provided a complicated yet sound approach for analyzing the interview data and helped me identify anchors and objectifications from the participants' multiculturalism-related social representations. Whenever the participants were talking about VET as a system, they appeared to generate meta-representational accounts. In order to deal with this challenge, I ended up focusing on meta-representational talk that explicitly addressed relational aspects of multiculturalism. Ultimately, I found that the concept of metarepresentations helped me go even deeper in my analysis of the experts' social representations of multiculturalism.

7.3 Rising above

Social representation theory seeks to explain how scientific knowledge has transformed the way people think and talk in modern society. Moscovici (1984) argues that social representations make new objects familiar through anchoring and objectification. Anchoring compares objects to known categories and making evaluations based on differences and similarities. Objectification, on the other hand, captures the iconic quality of an abstract idea. The VET experts anchored multiculturalism to the familiar categories of difference, community, security, equality and economic productivity that have all been long-term factors in policy-making. Multiculturalism was objectified in a number of different ways, the most iconic of which were related to concrete images of social transformation brought about by increasing cultural diversity.

VET experts' representations of multiculturalism contained numerous conflicts, contradictions and tensions. Multiple understandings of multiculturalism co-existed, often in the same participant's responses. The experts drew upon multiple sources of knowledge ranging from their own professional expertise, to research, common sense and popular knowledge as depicted in the media. All of these were tied together and expressed in different combinations, with politics, science and ideology each playing a role. The concept of cognitive polyphasia can be used to describe the conglomeration and co-habitation of several different forms of knowledge (Jovchelitch, 2002). In this case, expert knowledge was used to explain the challenges faced by Finnish society and the VET system in particular as well as argue for particular educational policies as a response to the challenges posed by multiculturalism.

The polyphasic nature of the participants' responses is most clear in the meta-representations that they employed. By arguing for the economic origins of conflict and tension between native and non-native Finns, the experts brought a sociological and social psychological dimension to the question of xenophobia. They demonstrated their awareness and even empathy for what "common people" may be thinking in contemporary Finland. Such depictions of common sense are interesting as well as worrying because they point to a future where polarization and tension are likely to increase rather than disappear.

The experts' candid descriptions of the challenges that Finnish society is facing as it becomes more culturally diverse should be of interest to researchers and policy-makers. Furthermore, from a social representations perspective the study demonstrates that experts' polyphasic modes of knowledge are rife with meaning and should be studied to shed light on important social and political questions. A metarepresentations approach was particularly well suited to this study because experts' speech was so rich that its analysis provided a unique vantage point from which to examine multiculturalism. Based on what the data has revealed, I urge policy-makers and experts to look for ways to pre-empt escalation of tension and conflict within VET and to ensure that it remains a place where all students are free to complete their vocational qualifications in peace and build successful lives. If ignored for long enough, experts' concern over the polarization of Finnish society is something that could potentially result in destructive tendencies strengthening their hold in VET.

7.4 Future directions

My hope is that this study has done something to prove the potential of social representation theory in understanding the role of multiculturalism in VET and policy-making. In order to broaden this understanding, future studies should include both students and staff since both groups are vital links to understanding how social knowledge is produced in VET. The information that could potentially be uncovered through such a multifaceted research program could have serious real-world implications. In particular, the further development of SRT in conjunction with the growing interest in meta-representations is something that could benefit decision-makers. It is of growing importance for educational policy-makers to be aware of and respond to how people significant others, especially in such a politically and socially divided era as the one we are currently living through. Social psychology is critical to promoting understanding and equality and combating racism and prejudice in all its form. Social psychology should, therefore, be concerned with concrete, contemporary affairs and head in the direction where it is needed most. It is my personal conviction that VET is a crucible of intercultural social relations in Finnish society and social psychological inquiry has a major role to play here.

The next step in pursuing this research would be to widen the pool of participants and see if these views are unique to experts or if they are also shared by non-experts and, if so, in what forms? With approximately 325 000 people studying in VET, it is of critical importance to see how the issues that the respondents have raised are understood in the everyday lived reality. There is plenty of work to do both in understanding and addressing intercultural tensions and conflicts in VET. On a broader note, it would also be important to understand the tensions and conflicts involved in policy-making. Although it was not the focus of this particular study, the issue of different schools of thought competing for supremacy within educational policy-making is also highly interesting and deserves further study.

The research data can be utilized to explore other social representations than multiculturalism. Naturally, the interview data can also be analyzed from some other perspective than SRT. In the end, around half of the interview data was not directly relevant to the subject of this study because it went too deep into educational policy and institutional practice. While vital for providing a background for the experts' perspectives on multiculturalism, it could be explored further on its own by, for example, studying the experts' social representations of the VET reform itself and the process that led to it. The data could also be utilized as comparative or complementary research material when studying other educational reforms.

8. References

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Appendix 1: Consent form

SUOSTUMUS TIETEELLISEEN TUTKIMUKSEEN

Tämän Helsingin yliopiston Sosiaalipsykologian laitokselle tehtävän pro gradu-tutkielman aiheena on monikulttuurisuuteen liittyvät käsitykset ammatillisessa koulutuksessa. Haastateltava suostuu siihen, että aineistoa käytetään opinnäytetyön tutkimusaineistona.

Kaikki minusta tutkimuksen aikana kerättävät tiedot käsitellään luottamuksellisina. Tutkimuksessa kerätyt tiedot koodataan siten, ettei henkilöllisyyden selvittäminen ole myöhemmin mahdollista.

Ymmärrän, että osallistumiseni tähän tutkimukseen on täysin vapaaehtoista. Minulla on oikeus milloin tahansa tutkimuksen aikana ja syytä ilmoittamatta keskeyttää tutkimukseen osallistuminen. Tutkimuksesta kieltäytymisellä tai sen keskeyttämisellä ei ole jatkoseurauksia.

Allekirjoituksellani vahvistan osallistumiseni tähän tutkimukseen ja suostun vapaaehtoisesti tutkittavaksi.

_____ _____

Allekirjoitus Päiväys

_____ _____

Nimen selvennys Syntymäaika

_____

Osoite

Suostumus vastaanotettu

_____ _____

Vastaavan tutkijan allekirjoitus Päiväys

Nimen selvennys

Alkuperäinen allekirjoitettu tutkittavan suostumus sekä kopio tutkittavan tiedotteesta jäävät tutkijan arkistoon. Tutkittavan tiedote ja kopio allekirjoitetusta suostumuksesta annetaan tutkittavalle

Appendix 2: Interview framework for VET experts (adapted from E. Andreouli et al., 2016)

Vapaa sana-assosiaatio lämmittelytehtävä:

Nykyään puhutaan paljon monikulttuurisuudesta. Millaisia sanoja tai lauseita sinulle tulee mieleen kun ajattelet sanaa "monikulttuurisuus" ammatillisen koulutuksen kontekstissa? (3 minuuttia aikaa kirjoittaa paperille)

Miltä tehtävä tuntui? Oliko helppo/vaikea? Miksi?

<u>Minä ja muut</u>

Lue paperille kirjoittamasi sanat ja lauseet uudelleen läpi ja mieti, mitkä niistä ovat mielestäsi tärkeimmät. Voit myös lisätä uusia sanoja ja lauseita, jos jotain tulee vielä mieleen.

Haluatko kertoa, mitkä sanat tai lauseet ovat mielestäsi tärkeimpiä ja miksi?

Mitä arvelet, että muut ammatillisen koulutuksen parissa työskentelevät tai opiskelevat ajattelevat näistä asioista?

Oletko heidän kanssaan samaa vai eri mieltä?

Miksi he ajattelevat näin?

Millaisia ajatuksia heidän näkemyksensä herättävät sinussa?

Mitä tästä seuraa?

<u>Asiantuntijan oman organisaation näkökulma</u>

Missä yhteyksissä ammatillisen koulutuksen monikulttuurisuus tulee esiin työssäsi? Voitko kertoa esimerkin? Mistä se kertoo?

Millaisia tavoitteita tai toiveita sinulla tai teidän organisaatiolla on suhteessa ammatillisen koulutuksen monikulttuurisuuteen?

Entäs millaisia huolenaiheita?

Miten nämä suhteutuvat muiden asiantuntijoiden tai organisaatioiden tavoitteisiin tai toiveisiin?

Millaisia näkemyseroja tai ristiriitoja näihin liittyy?

Miten ne ilmenevät?

Millaisia tunteita ne herättävät sinussa?

Mitä luulet heidän ajattelevan sinun/organisaatiosi näkemyksistä?

Mistä nämä eri näkökulmat kumpuavat?

Mitä niistä seuraa?

<u>Monikulttuurisuus ammatillisessa koulutuksessa yleisesti</u>

Millainen vaikutus monikulttuurisuudella on ammatilliseen koulutukseen ylipäätänsä?

Onko jotain mitä haluaisit muuttaa tavassa, jolla monikulttuurisuutta käsitellään ammatillisessa koulutuksessa? Miten sitä pitäisi käsitellä?

Miten monikulttuurisuus otetaan huomioon ammatillisen koulutuksen päätöksenteossa?

Miten monikulttuurisuuteen liittyvät käsitykset ja käytännöt ovat kehittyneet vuosien varrella? Mihin suuntaan ammatillisessa koulutuksessa ollaan tällä hetkellä menossa?

Mihin suuntaan pitäisi mennä?

Appendix 3: Diagram of thematic categories